













*The Culbertson*  
*System*  
**OF CANASTA**

BY ELY CULBERTSON

*A scientifically integrated system of  
Canasta strategy and tactics, based  
on mathematical probabilities and  
psychology*

INCLUDING  
**S A M B A**  
(Three-Deck Canasta)

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## Introduction

YET IN 1930 even we—even the experts—played Canasta in an experimental but of mass fashion. In their books on Canasta the poor authors were hard-pressed to keep one step ahead of the facts. New methods of play were developing so rapidly that every book on the "latest strategy" of the game became out-of-date nearly as soon as it was published. Of course, the unfortunate public was generally unaware of this—and even today there are millions of Canasta players who learned by these books, each an innocent victim of his particular professor. When I decided to produce my first Canasta book, I waited several months, so as to study and test different methods of play. As compared with books by other authors—written months before—my book, *Culbertson on Canasta*, was more advanced and more correct in the advice it gave. But even then, I could not escape some blunders. I was late on the market, and it cost me \$100,000 in lost sales to be *less* wrong. That was *my* biggest blunder.

But I did state in *Culbertson on Canasta* that the only thing the game needed was a Culbertson method to be added to its madness. At the time, I was not yet certain that a full-fledged *system* for playing Canasta could be devised. True, Canasta, like Contract Bridge, is basically a partnership game. And to win consistently at Canasta, as at bridge, partnership coöperation is indispensable. But partnership coöperation is impossible without partnership *information*. And here, Canasta has been in a hopeless state of confusion. Players have little or no idea what kind of hands their partners hold, or what they are trying to do with them.

Often it turns out that partners are playing at cross-purposes. Mutual recriminations follow—and the Canasta arguments between partners can easily drown out the celebrated bridge post-mortems.

After a year's painstaking research, study and testing, in association with the best Canasta brains, I am now ready to state unequivocally that a system for playing Canasta is possible, and that the proof is contained in this book, which describes the first and so far the only Canasta system. The Culbertson System of Canasta is not a collection of artificial signals or conventions that must be memorized. It is a coherent, logical pattern of play, built around a single principle, based on mathematical probabilities, and scientifically designed to make you win more, and more often, than you possibly could otherwise.

When you play the Culbertson System of Canasta, you will know what line of play to adopt initially on every type of hand, and what tactics to use as the hand progresses through its various stages. What's more, you will know what your partner is trying to do, and he will know what kind of hand you have and what you are aiming for.

In this book, I have taken it for granted that you know all the rules of Canasta (for the new 1951 Laws, see page 83). I have also assumed that you have had some actual playing experience; that you know elementary, obvious points; that you can remember fairly accurately your left-hand opponent's discards; and that you usually have a general idea what cards are in the discard pile. Aside from that, unless you are an exceptional player, forget all that you have been taught about Canasta and start from scratch. You will be well rewarded.

Of course, no system can be a substitute for talent. The player with good judgment and common sense will always have an advantage in any game of skill. But I do not hesitate to assert that, other factors (such as ability to remember cards) being approximately equal, *any team using the*

*Call on System of Canasta will win against a partnership that does not!*

To judge the correctness of my claim, read this book. I repeat it: *Read this book!*

\* \* \* \* \*

Among the many Canasta writers, experts and teachers who have so generously given me the benefit of their advice, experience and criticism in the preparation of this book, I am particularly grateful to Myron Field, one of the best Canasta players in the world, as well as a champion bridge player and a master analyst of all card games.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Strategy of Big Hands

Every once in a while, on a hand of Canasta, a team makes a killing—melding canasta after canasta, regularly gathering in the pack, and happily milking the stock right down to the end, while the opponents squirm. The partners' score on that hand may be anywhere from 2000 to even 5000 points.

It is like making a grand slam at bridge, or a hole in one at golf. You have probably had this exhilarating experience—if not, I am surprised that you are still playing Canasta. On the other hand, you have probably been the victim of such a killing, frustrated in your struggles to go out, possibly blaming your partner for the events leading up to the tragedy.

In any case, if you would like to make such Canasta killings more often than you do, you have come to the right place. The Culbertson System of Canasta is designed precisely to produce for you a maximum share of these hands. Its strategy is based on these big hands, not for psychological reasons, but for mathematical reasons. A big hand will not only give you a smug, triumphant feeling; it will also more than make up for a number of small losses. If you follow the Culbertson System of Canasta and concentrate on trying to make these big killings whenever it is remotely possible, you will win more games of Canasta, and you will win them with much bigger scores.

Do not think that these big hands are "all luck." They are not. True, you have to hold the proper kind of hand in order to fight successfully for a large pack. But with the proper hand, how can you best fight for the pack? And once you have managed to capture the pack, how should you proceed in order to make a big hand out of it?

Before answering these questions, let us see what the ideal situation would be for a big killing. Once we have determined what we are aiming for, we can then study the means of attaining that objective.

### The Aim: Control of the Hand

Suppose your team has melded sets of three or more each of aces, kings, queens, and so on down to the 4-spots. You have at



least fifteen cards in your hand, and so does your partner. You each hold at least three cards that are known to be safe discards against the opponents. As for the opponents, they either have no meld at all, or only melds without a four-card base.

In this situation, your side has complete and absolute control of the hand.

This control has the following results:

1. Any natural card that an opponent throws can be picked up either by you or by your partner.
2. For at least three rounds, neither you nor your partner will make a discard that will enable the opponents to take the pack.
3. If the opponents freeze the pack, your side will have a much better chance than the opponents of capturing it sooner or later, due to the larger number of cards you both hold.

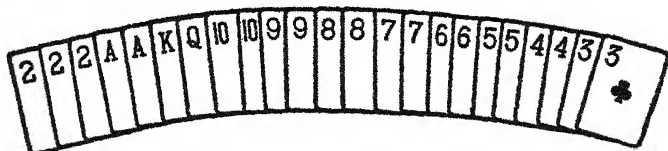
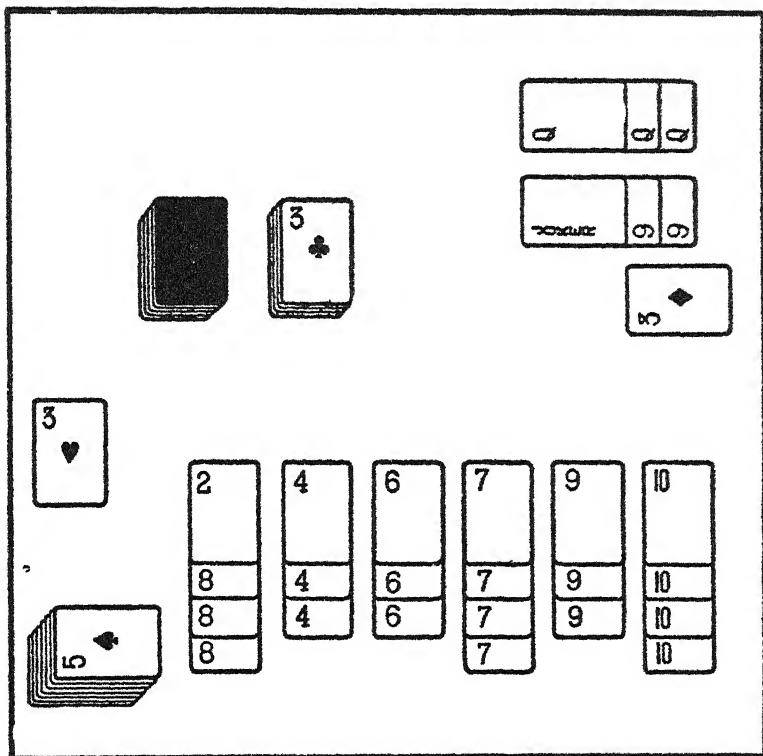
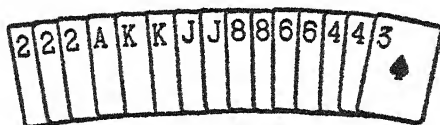
Obviously, when you have such complete control of a hand, you will be able to accumulate a big score. The longer the hand lasts, the bigger your winnings. The only way the opponents can stop you from piling up points is by going out; and for this they must rely on picks from the stock, since your discards will not help them. Both you and your partner will be able to take the pack at will, letting it grow while you have safe discards available, and picking it up when you are low on these. At the same time, if you suspect that the opponents are about to go out, you will be able to go out yourself, if you wish. After all, with every denomination melded on your side, any card in your hand is meldable.

In order to have complete control, it is not necessary to have a meld in every denomination. The same situation would result if the cards looked like the example on the opposite page.

With this setup, every card thrown to you except a jack, and every card thrown to your partner except a queen, could be picked up if the pack were not frozen. If the opponents should freeze it, there are other cards that could pass by your team; but the opponents could not keep the pack away from you indefinitely.

Although this example of complete control is not mathematically certain, it suffices for practical purposes. If your melds and the cards in your team's hands insure you that you will not have

## PARTNER



## YOU

*An Ideal Situation for a Big Killing: Complete Control*

to give the pack away, while the opponents almost surely will, we shall call that situation complete control.

Complete control is an ideal situation, but there are relatively

few hands on which it can be achieved. However, in practically every Canasta game there is at least one hand on which a team can produce a situation which will give them considerable control.

Now that we know that control is what we're aiming for, how do we go after it?

### How to Achieve Control

The first requirement for control is a large number of cards. These can be acquired either by capturing a large pack or repeatedly capturing medium-sized packs. In actual play, control develops more frequently from the grabbing of one very large pack. But getting the big pack is only the first step. Next comes the technique of turning these cards into control. Here is how you should go about it, once you have pounced on a big pack (and by large, I mean one containing at least twenty-five cards):

The player who captured the pack should, at the time of capture, make the following melds: (a) any natural canastas; (b) four out of any set of six of a kind; (c) three out of every set of five of a kind. He should make no other melds at this point, and should discard a safe card.

*Example:* Your hand, upon capturing a pack, consists of:

2-2-A-K-Q-Q-Q-J-J-10-10-9-8-8-8-8-7-7-7-7-7-6-6-6-5-5-4-4-4-3-3-3.

You got the pack with a pair of 5's and melded joker-5-5-5.

You should now meld 8-8-8, and 7-7-7-7, nothing else. And you should discard a black 3.

Your partner at this point still has only his original eleven cards. His first objective is to increase the number of cards in his hand. He therefore *must not make any meld* whatsoever on this round. He must also refuse to take the first card thrown by the opponent, regardless of how valuable this card may be. Let us assume that your partner holds:

2-A-K-Q-Q-10-9-8-6-6-5

His opponent throws an 8. Even though your partner knows that this 8, together with the 8's melded and the pair of 8's he knows you have in your hand, will make a natural canasta, he must

refuse it, draw from the stock, and discard a safe card—if necessary, even his 8-spot. His aim is to gain control, and to do that he needs more cards. Actually, giving up a meld—even a canasta—will prove to be only a temporary sacrifice. Once control is achieved, the entire discard pile will become, in effect, the personal property of your side.

Now, how about your second play? You too must refuse to take the pack on this round. Your present objective is to help your partner get more cards in his hand. Your strategy is two-fold: to let the pack grow sufficiently to make it worth-while for your partner to take it, and at the same time to try to increase his chances of getting it. You therefore draw from the stock—a king, let us say. Your hand now is:

2-2-A-K-K-Q-Q-Q-J-J-10-10-9-8-8-7-7-6-6-5-5-4-4-4-3-3

You should meld your sets of three—Q's, 6's, and 4's—and discard another black 3.

When play comes around to your partner, every natural card except a jack will enable him to take the pack, either by means of the cards in his hand or the melds on the table. We shall assume that the opponent does not throw a jack, but discards some other natural card.

Here your partner *must* take the pack, regardless of how worthless the top card is. For by doing so he will obtain five new cards from the pack. He will increase the number of cards in his hand, be able to meld toward a natural canasta of 8's, and will have two black 3's for discards. Your team is now well on the way toward absolute control.

This example demonstrated the fundamental principles of play immediately after a large capture. These are:

A. The capturer must:

- 1) On the first round of play, hold up a pair from each of his long melds and not meld any short sets.
- 2) Refuse to take the pack on the second round.
- 3) On the second round, make as many short melds as possible while still retaining at least sixteen cards in his hand.
- 4) Make safe discards only.

B. The capturer's partner must:

- 1) Refuse to take the pack on the first round.
- 2) Make no meld on the first round.
- 3) Discard as safe a card as possible on the first round.
- 4) Take the pack if possible on the second round.

Here it may be well to clarify a term which will occur frequently throughout this book—"safe discards." Actually, aside from wild cards, only black 3's or cards of which there are seven accounted for are mathematically safe. However, you can often tell from previous plays that some discards are safe. For example, if during a hand you discarded three 5's which passed by your left-hand opponent; and if, in addition, he discarded one or more 5's himself, it is evident that he does not have a pair of 5's left. A 5-spot in these circumstances will be termed a safe discard, without bothering to qualify the statement.

### The Technique of Control in an Actual Hand

The technique just described is of such fundamental importance that the reader would do well to familiarize himself with it thoroughly. At first it may appear complicated, but after trying it a few times it will come almost automatically. To illustrate the control-technique fully, here is another example, which we shall follow step by step:

Capturer's hand after taking the pack:

2-A-K-K-K-J-10-10-9-8-8-7-7-7-7-6-6-6-6-5-5-4-4-4-3-3-3

Partner's Hand: 2-2-A-A-Q-J-J-9-6-6-5

ROUND 1							
Capturer's Draw	Capturer's Meld	Capturer's Discard	L-O's Discard	Partner's Draw	Partner's Meld	Partner's Discard	R-O's Discard
	Joker, Q-Q-Q 7-7-7 6-6-6	3	ace	ace	...	6	9
(took pack)							
ROUND 2							
jack	K-K-K 4-4-4	3	10	queen	...	6	3
ROUND 3							
10	...	3	9	takes pack	...	...	...

Let us analyze the plays in detail:

The capturer grabbed the pack with a pair of queens and a joker. In accordance with rule 1, he melded only 7-7-7, 6-6-6, and discarded a black 3. His partner, on the first round, had an ace thrown to him. In accordance with his rule 1, he refused to take it although he had a pair of aces in his hand. He made no meld and discarded a 6-spot. This followed his rule 3, because the 6 was certainly a safe discard.

On the second round, the capturer refused to take the 9 that was thrown to him, in accordance with his rule 2. He drew a jack from the stock, and melded K-K-K, 4-4-4. These melds were intended to help his partner pick up the pack. On partner's second round, a 10-spot was thrown to him, which, as you can see, he could not take. He had to draw from the stock, and again he discarded a 6. Obviously, he was glad that he had not melded those 6-spots. If he hadn't held on to them, he might easily have given the pack away with his discard on this round.

On the third round, the capturer did not have much choice. He might have been tempted to meld his set of 10's in order to give his partner some further help, but that would have reduced his hand to twelve cards, which might have made it profitable for the opponents to freeze the pack. (The profits and losses of freezing will be covered later in Chapter 6, devoted entirely to freezing.) Capturer therefore did not meld, and discarded another black 3.

On this same third round, partner had a 9 thrown to him. Having a 9 and a deuce in his hand, he proceeded to take the pack. He was not anxious to use one of his wild cards in this manner, but any other course might have turned out to be very dangerous: he was not sure of being able to discard safely without help from the pack.

After getting the pack, partner's hand consists of:

2-A-A-A-A-Q-Q-J-J-10-9-6-6-5-3-3-3-3

He can now afford to meld his pair of 6's, which will produce a natural canasta. After melding and discarding, he will have fifteen cards left. He also has at least three absolutely safe discards

in reserve. It should not take long before complete control is attained.

### With Control, Don't Go Out

At this stage we will not go into the question of how long the partnership should continue to hold up meldable cards in their hands, or when they should start using wild cards to complete canastas. These further melds should be made only when the opponents threaten to go out. How to recognize this danger will be explained later.

One important point should be clarified now: Once control is achieved, neither you nor your partner should go out, even if the opponents are clearly on the verge of going out. Your team may complete canastas with wild cards, but you should definitely continue to play the hand.

True, if the opponents go out, they may catch you with a few hundred points you could have melded, but this is of minor importance when compared to the potential gain on any hand that is under complete control. After all, if the opponents should have poor luck in picking from the stock, they may be obliged to throw one canasta after another into your laps.

From this chapter you have seen how really big scores can be accumulated on a hand after capturing a large pack. Of course, it is hard to predict just how fat a score will result, but on the average it has been found that a 30-card pack, for example, will net about 2500-3500 points—provided, of course, that the correct control-technique, as explained in this chapter, is followed. Sometimes, of course, the opponents will be lucky enough to go out very quickly and you will be stuck with a large number of meldable cards. But at other times you will be able to play the hand all the way down to the last card of the stock, squeezing the opponents on each play until you net as much as 5,000 points or more.

Now that you appreciate how valuable a large pack can be, you will have a proper sense of proportion in learning the Culbertson System of Canasta, starting from the very beginning of the game.

## CHAPTER 2

### What Type of Hand Were You Dealt?

*On any hand of Canasta, the proper strategy depends a great deal on the initial meld requirements of both sides. If your side must have 120 points for your initial meld and your opponents' initial meld requirement is only 50, you will play the hand quite differently than if the opponents need 120 and you need 50. In describing the Culbertson System of Canasta, I will start at the beginning of the game, when both sides have an initial meld requirement of 50. Later I shall take up the different tactics to be used in different score-situations.*

*For brevity's sake, I will in the future refer to the initial meld situation simply as 50-50, or 90-50, etc. For instance, if I say the score is 50-120, it means that the score of the game is such that your side's initial meld requirement is 50, while your opponents' initial meld requirement is 120. Now for play at 50-50.*

There are 2,440,634 possible hands you can be dealt in regular, four-handed, partnership Canasta. But basically there are only four possible *types* of hand you can pick up. It is important that you learn to recognize immediately the kind of hand you are dealt, because it will determine your general line of play right from the start. The eleven cards you collect from the dealer will fall into one of four fundamental categories:

1. *The Pack Hand*—a hand with which you have a good chance to capture the discard pile, or pack.
2. *The Out Hand*—a hand with which you should try to go out as fast as possible.
3. *The In-Between Hand*—a hand which is shaped in such a way that later developments may turn it into either a Pack Hand or an Out Hand.
4. *The Neither Hand*—a poor hand which, at the beginning, is unsuitable for anything except "wait and hope."



### The Pack Hand

A Pack Hand, of course, is the type of hand you would like to be dealt every time. It is a hand with which you should make an all-out effort to grab the discard pile—the bigger the pile, the better. The capture of a fat pack, as you know, opens the door to potential Canasta riches. What makes a good Pack Hand?

If you are to get the initial pack, of course, your right-opponent must discard a card that you can meld with a natural pair of your own. There is nothing you can do *directly* to induce him to be so obliging. But you can try to bring about this result indirectly, by making every possible effort to discard safely yourself, until your right-opponent throws a card you can use. It is a simple mathematical fact that, if you don't give the pack away, there remain two opponents as against only one partner who may do so. A fundamental maxim of Canasta, therefore, is this:

*The best way to get the pack is by not giving it away yourself.*

If you are to avoid giving the pack away, you need a number of safe discards. Of course, in the early stages of a hand, practically no card is mathematically "safe," except wild cards and black 3's. But there are certain clues as to the safety of discards, based not on certainty but on strong probabilities. The most important of these clues is the following: If, when the pack is worth taking, you throw a certain card, and that card passes by your opponent, then it is probably safe to throw cards of the same denomination on subsequent rounds. For example, if you have a set of three kings and discard one of them, which your left-opponent fails to take, you should assume that it will be safe for you to throw a king on each of the next two rounds. In this book we will refer to your second two kings (and comparative cards in similar situations) as "safe discards."

Here we come to the first requirement of a Pack Hand: *It must contain at least one set of three or more of a kind.*

There are other specifications, which will become apparent as we follow the next illustration of a Pack Hand and the line of play that should be adopted with it:

You dealt, and your hand, after your first draw, is:

Joker-2-K-K-K-7-7-5-5-4-4-3

The previous discards were as follows:

<u>Up-Card</u>	<u>L-O</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>R-O</u>	<u>You</u>
5	9	5	6	?

Your best first play is to meld nothing and discard a king. If your opponent fails to take it and the pack comes around to you intact, you should discard a king again on the next round, regardless of what you may have picked from the stock. On the following round your last king should be discarded. You still have your black 3, which you may discard on the next round. You have succeeded in discarding safely for four rounds, and by the time it is your turn on the fifth round you will probably have enough evidence to know what other cards in your hand are safe.

It is not my intention at this stage to discuss thoroughly the lines of reasoning that lead to safe discarding all the way through the play of a hand. All I want to do here is to stress the fact that, when you have a Pack Hand, you should *create* safe discards for yourself by breaking up a set of three of a kind, following it up by continuing to throw away from that set, and on subsequent rounds discarding whichever cards are safest.

There is one more requirement for a Pack Hand, in addition to a set of three or more of a kind: *A Pack Hand must also contain at least one wild card, but no more than three wild cards.*

There are two reasons why you need at least one wild card. First, you need a deuce in order to meet the count of 50 without any trouble if you are hit. Second, you may need a deuce to discard, in order to freeze the pack. Let us see about this freezing business right now, for it is an essential part of your strategy while playing a Pack Hand.

If at any stage of a hand on which you are playing for the pack, either opponent should go down *from his own hand*, making an initial meld without taking the pack, you should immediately freeze the pack *regardless* of the make-up of your hand. One reason: as soon as the opponents have melded initially, cards that were presumed to be safe discards before are no longer to be

considered safe. All you know from the fact that a king passed safely by your left-opponent is that he does not have a pair of kings. But he may easily have one king; and if you now throw a king he will be able to take the pack with just one king and a deuce, since the pack is open for their side. The second reason for freezing is that your chances of eventually capturing a frozen pack are much greater than the opponents'. The mere fact that both you and your partner still have your original number of cards, while one of the opponents has reduced his hand, will give your team a decided advantage.

The reason a Pack Hand should not contain more than three wild cards is this: a large number of wild cards clutters up your hand, crowding out natural pairs that you otherwise might have or would acquire later, and which might enable you to take the pack. On the other hand, as we will see later, hands containing four or more wild cards are well suited to a play for a quick out.

We can now summarize the essential tactics in the play of a Pack Hand:

- a) Break up a set of three or more of a kind, and continue throwing from that set until it is exhausted.
- b) On subsequent rounds, throw the safest possible cards.
- c) Do not meld from your hand.
- d) If either opponent melds from his hand, freeze the pack immediately.
- e) Whenever you can meld by taking the pack, do so.

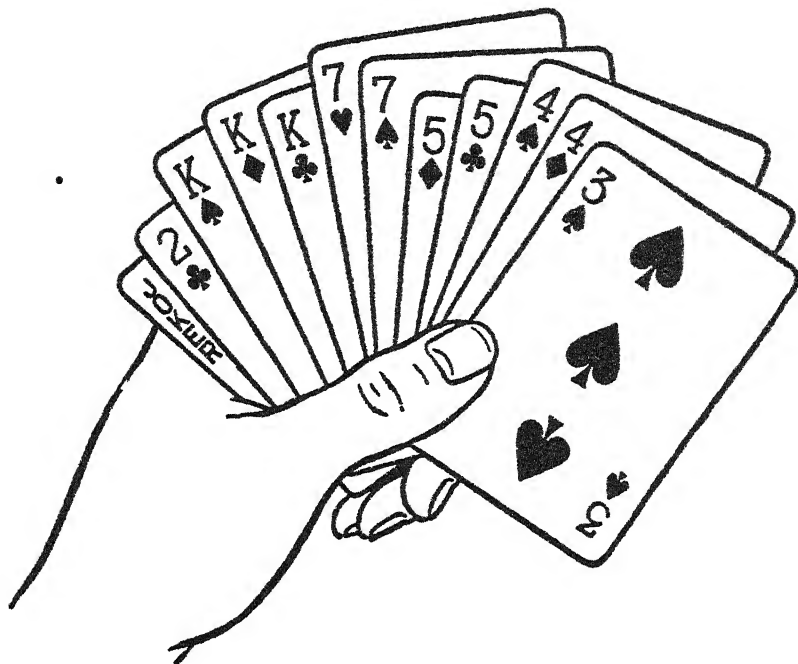
Let us now take up some more examples of Pack Hands and describe the proper play in more detail.

### How to Play a Pack Hand

The first example will be the hand we mentioned before. Here it is again. (*See illustration on next page.*)\*

This is an exceptionally good Pack Hand. Not only do you have four safe discards if your first king gets by, but you also have three low pairs, which constitute a difficult target for your R-O to escape. In addition, if either opponent should go down from his hand, you can well afford to spare your deuce for freez-

\* Note that the hand contains twelve cards, which means that we are looking at it after your pick from the stock. All through this book I will give examples of hands, sometimes containing eleven and sometimes twelve cards. It will always be obvious from the context whether I am giving the hand before or after the draw, so no explanation will be given in each specific case.



*(Illustration for hand on page 12)*

ing and still retain a joker. You start off by throwing one of your kings.

I shall now repeat the discards on the first round. They were:

<u>Up-Card</u>	<u>L-O</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>R-O</u>	<u>You</u>
5	9	5	6	K

On the second round, L-O throws a 5-spot, partner discards a jack, and R-O goes down with 2-Q-Q-Q, discarding a black 3. You pick a 10 from the stock and freeze the pack. From now on, you intend to discard kings as long as they last, then your black 3, deciding upon further safe discards according to whatever new evidence you can gather meanwhile. Your partner can safely throw whatever queens he has. Sixes also should be safe discards for him, because R-O discarded a 6 on the first round. He would probably not have discarded a 6 and later melded 2-Q-Q-Q if he had had a set of each in his hand. Thus, your partner appar-

ently will have little difficulty finding safe discards, especially since he is throwing into a hand that has been depleted by the original meld. Altogether, the odds are heavily in favor of your side's not giving the pack away—and therefore of your getting it sooner or later.

The only way the opponents can avoid a large loss on this hand is by going out quickly. R-O may have a handful of wild cards, and going down may have been his best play. But maybe he hasn't. Perhaps he went down with a hand such as:

2-2-A-Q-Q-Q-10-10-6-5-4-3\*

In this case, he will probably have to wait a long time before his out-play materializes. Meanwhile, having a limited choice of discards, he will be in danger of giving away the pack every time he makes a play.

His partner is in a dilemma. Should he meld too, trying to help his partner go out, or should he keep his hand intact, trying to get the pack? If he decides to meld too, he will, in effect, abandon all hope of getting the pack and stake everything on the realization of a quick out-play. If he decides to hold up his melds, his side will still have a chance at the pack; but with his partner's depleted holding, this chance will be much slimmer than yours, since you and your partner have eleven cards each, with a number of safe discards available.

Thus, regardless of which line of play L-O adopts, your side has the better chance of capturing the pack. Of course, it is impossible to predict what will actually happen. For instance, L-O may be lucky enough to draw a king "on the turn," just before you get rid of your last king. In that case you will lose the pack, and all your good strategy will have gone for naught. However, remember that the only thing a good system can accomplish is to put you in a position where the laws of probability favor your getting the greatest possible advantage. No system for any game in which luck plays a part, as it does in Canasta, can guarantee success every time.

\* With this hand, an initial meld without taking the pack was advocated by all authors of previous Canasta books.

## Old-Fashioned Canasta vs. System Canasta

At this point, let us compare our way of treating Pack Hands with the old-fashioned way. We do not meld from our hand; we do break up a set of three; we follow it up with further discards from that set; we freeze the pack if an opponent goes down from his hand. The old-fashioned way was to meld from one's hand, by laying down the set of three with a wild card, for the mere reason that such a meld is an economical one and enables you to retain another wild card in your hand.

In order to highlight the differences between the two styles of play, we will analyze an example in which all four players are dealt essentially identical hands. In this illustration, you and your partner will play the Culbertson System of Canasta, while the opponents will not. Here are the four hands, as they were dealt around the table:

Joker-2-A-K-Q-J-J-10-6-6-5		
Joker-2-A-K-Q-Q-Q-J-10-7-7-6	<div>Partner L-O R-O You</div>	Joker-2-A-K-Q-J-10-10-5-5-4
•	Joker-2-A-K-K-K-Q-J-10-7-4-4	

R-O dealt, and the above hands are shown after each player's first pick. These being Pack Hands, you will throw a king on your first play and your partner will discard a jack. The opponents, who are not playing our system, may select one of the following three plays: They may go down from their hands, making the initial meld with a set and a joker; or they may advertise; or they may throw loose cards on the first round, with the intention of making the initial meld on the second round. We shall assume that L-O chooses to advertise, throwing a queen, while his partner chooses to meld Joker-10-10-10, discarding his jack. You now draw a 7-spot and, following our recommended strategy, freeze the pack.

This is how the situation shapes up around the table: R-O has seven cards left in his hand: 2-A-K-Q-5-5-4. He has to throw fresh, loose cards on each round, and it is therefore probable that he will hit you if the pack stays intact for many rounds. You,

after discarding a deuce, are prepared for two rounds of safe discards (your two kings), and your further plays will depend on what L-O does. As a minimum, you know that you are safe for the first four rounds of the hand.

L-O has two possible lines of play open to him. He can add a 10 and his two wild cards to his partner's meld, thus completing a canasta, and keep discarding loose cards. If he does that, he gives up all chance of his side's capturing the pack; for it is hardly conceivable that two depleted hands can capture a frozen pack from two full hands. His only hope with this line of play is that either he or his partner may go out fairly quickly; but a look at their hands should convince you that such a possibility would require extraordinary good luck in picking.

L-O's alternative is to keep his own hand intact. If he does that, he retains some chance at the pack, but it is only a fair one at best. (I would estimate that your chances are about 80%, and theirs are 20%.) An additional drawback in this line of play is that if L-O fails to meld and complete the canasta, he may be hurting his partner. After all, L-O does not know the nature of his partner's holding. His partner *might* have a hand with which he could go out as soon as a canasta is made. But since the opponents are not playing the Culbertson System of Canasta, there is no way of knowing. The old-fashioned way calls for making an initial meld on the hand that R-O actually has *as well as* on a good Out Hand. Thus, whatever L-O does is based on sheer guesswork, and his side will probably lose on the hand.

Let us now look at your partner's position. He has the easiest time of all. He can discard his 10 and his two jacks with utmost confidence. He is almost certain not to give the pack away.

By now you should have a good idea of the correct technique of playing a Pack Hand, at least during the initial five or six rounds. You also know, from the first chapter, how to exploit your advantage if you capture a large pack. Now, what should you do if you capture a small pack?

### **If You Get a Small Pack**

I have stressed repeatedly the great advantage of capturing a fat, rich pack. But this does not mean that you should disdain to take a small pack when you have the opportunity. A small

pack gives you a definite advantage, even though it may not be a decisive one. It is a poor gamble to refuse a certain small gain because you think that you have a better-than-even chance for a large gain. Therefore, you should take even a small pack if you can, but it shouldn't be too small. A two- or three-card pack, for instance, does not give you any advantage at all, for after taking it, the number of cards in your hand is actually reduced. But a pack of four cards or more is worth taking.

If the pack contained only four or five cards, you will be left, after melding and discarding, with about eleven cards in your hand, as before. Your play from this point on should not differ materially from your original strategy. If your hand, after taking the pack, still looks like a Pack Hand, play it as such. There are no essentially new problems that are apt to arise.

If the first pack that you capture was larger in size (seven to twelve cards), you have gained a fairly strong advantage and should try to exploit it by trying to gain control of the hand. But you must realize that your attempt does not have the excellent prospect of success that the capture of a large pack would have afforded. For that reason, you should compromise, to a certain extent, in your tactics.

As is the case with a large pack, you should hold up meldable cards in your hand and discard safely. Similarly, your partner should refuse the pack on the very first round after your capture but take it, if possible, on the next round. However, you cannot afford to discard valuable cards, because you are not certain enough of recapturing them. Also, having only twelve to sixteen cards in your hand, you cannot afford to make melds for the purpose of helping your partner get the pack. That would reduce your hand to a point where the opponents would find it advantageous to freeze. Deprived of some of the tools that contribute toward the establishment of control, you cannot make "all-out" plays, such as discarding cards that could be used to make a canasta. You simply try to discard safely without sacrificing cards that are too valuable, hoping that a second capture either by you or your partner will put you in a position where a determined effort to gain control will be justified.



Here is an illustration of your proper procedure:  
R-O dealt. Your hand is:

2-A-K-K-Q-J-9-6-6-5-4

Your partner's hand is:

Joker-2-A-Q-Q-J-10-10-9-6-6

The up-card is a 7, and play on the first two rounds goes as follows:

Round	You Pick	You Throw	L-O Throws	Partner Picks	Partner Throws	R-O Throws
One:	10	10	7	K	K	8
Two:	6	6	5	K	K	6

You now take the pack, melding 6-6-6, 2-K-K. Your hand now consists of:

A-K-K-Q-J-10-9-8-7-7-6-5-5-4

You discard your 10; L-O draws and throws a 10 also. What should your partner do?

Partner must not take the 10, nor meld his 6's, because he is trying to gain control and needs more cards in his hand. He draws a queen from the stock. His hand now is:

Joker-2-A-Q-Q-J-10-10-9-6-6

His safest discard is undoubtedly a 6, for there are six 6's accounted for. A 6-spot *would* be his choice if you, his partner, had captured a really big pack and had around twenty-five cards left in your hand. He would then consider a 6-discard as merely a loan to the pack, which he would expect to get back later, when your melds enabled him to take the pack. But as things actually stand, you have only thirteen cards. He cannot expect you to make new melds, thereby reducing your hand. To get the pack, he must depend on being thrown an A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, or 6—and soon! For, after getting rid of his two 6's, he himself is in danger of giving away the pack.

So, instead of throwing the super-safe 6, partner must compromise. He throws a relatively safe but not too valuable card—

a queen. If the next player should grab it (acquiring two 10's with it), your side would have to forget about gaining control. Partner next time would meld his 6's and you would play for a moderate gain. The opportunity for gaining control would be lost, since the opponents, with a set of three queens (and probably a set of 10's) would have too early a start toward an out-play.

But the queen goes by! Partner is now all set with four safe discards—two queens and two 6's. He won't mind discarding the 6's under these conditions; for if he keeps the pack safe for *five* rounds, the opponents almost surely will give it away.

If an opponent goes down from his hand, your partner will freeze and fight for the pack, with eleven and thirteen cards on your side against their eleven and (say) seven. If the opponents freeze without going down, it's thirteen and eleven cards on your side against eleven and eleven for them, and both you and your partner are ready with safe discards for at least four rounds. If the opponents neither freeze nor meld, the odds against their keeping the pack away from your side are obviously very large.

### • When and Why to Break Up a Set

In the discussion of the proper play of a Pack Hand, I have stressed the advisability of breaking up a set of three of a kind. This in itself is not a new play. Other writers have mentioned it, and it is frequently referred to as "advertising" or "fishing." But our idea behind the play is quite different from the old one. Advertising was advised as a trick play, to be used occasionally for the purpose of fooling your right-opponent into matching your discard. I advise the breaking up of a set as a regular play, to be used on every Pack Hand for the purpose of providing three or more safe discards. We don't intend to fool the right-opponent; but, of course, if he *does* match our discard, we will gladly take the pack!

You have observed that in the foregoing discussion of a Pack Hand I have always had you break up your set and follow it through on the very first three rounds. This has been done for simplicity's sake, while you are learning the new technique.

However, you should not follow this procedure too rigidly in actual play. It would be too stereotyped and too easy for the opponents if you should always break up your set of three on the very first round. From a practical standpoint, you should vary your tactics. Sometimes you should start discarding from your set on the first round, sometimes on the second round; and at another time, though breaking up your set on the first round, you should not follow through immediately but wait for the third or fourth round instead. This will give you a more flexible style, and will make it more difficult for your opponents.

You now know how to play a Pack Hand, and I hope you have many of them, for practice and for profit. The opposite type of hand is just as easy to recognize, and the technique for playing it is just as clear-cut. It is the Out Hand.

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## CHAPTER 3

### The Out Hand

A hand that is suitable to play for a quick out, right from the start, either contains four wild cards or consists almost entirely of meldable cards.

A hand consisting mostly of meldable cards is very rare, and very simple to play. If you are dealt one of these curiosities, you simply meld all your natural sets and, with just a little help from your partner, you will probably go out very quickly. For instance, if you pick up 2-2-K-K-K-K-10-10-10-7-7-5, you meld your four kings and three 10's and discard the 5-spot. All your partner has to do is to add two cards to your king-meld or three cards to your 10-meld, and you will be out automatically. Other hands of this type that are not quite so good as the one above may require greater help from your partner or some luck in drawing. However, these hands do not present many problems.

More common is the type of Out Hand containing four or more wild cards. When dealt one of these, you should make up your mind immediately to play for out, even though the rest of your hand may consist largely of single cards. The first step in your play for out should be to make your initial meld as soon as you can. As you have seen, with the Culbertson system, the fact that you are making an initial meld out of your own hand has a definite, specific meaning. It tells your partner that you were dealt at least four wild cards. This information is of great importance to him in the play of the hand.

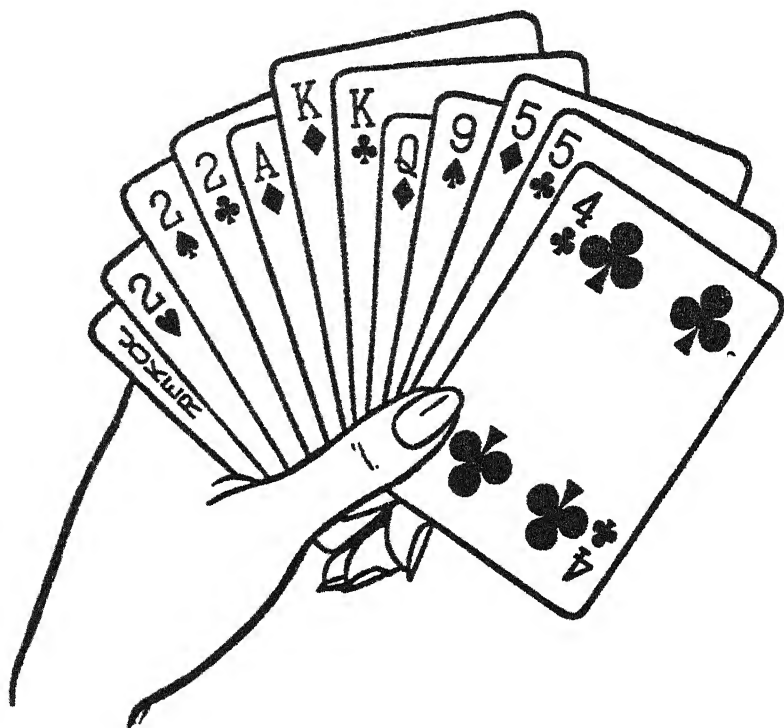
Remember, we are still dealing only with a 50-50 initial meld situation. At other scores, an initial meld carries no such implication. As you will see later, when your score calls for an initial meld of 90 or 120, an initial meld may well be put down for the purpose of enabling partner to take the pack, in case he should be hit with a card that matches a pair in his hand, but when he may be lacking the necessary count. But when your melding requirement is only 50, an initial meld is much less

likely to give your partner needed assistance; for most of the time a player has the necessary count of 50 dealt to him, or he acquires it very soon. In our system, therefore, an initial meld from your own hand at 50 denotes one thing only: the desire to play for a quick out.

Let us look at some examples of Out Hands and see how you should play them.

### How to Play an Out Hand

You were dealt:



You should immediately meld your joker with one of your pairs, say kings, and discard one of your loose cards, say the 4-spot. You have thereby announced to your partner your intention of playing for out, and he should help you. He should add as much to your meld as he can, completing a canasta if pos-

sible, and put down any natural set he may have. If he does neither, you will know that he cannot do so, and you should therefore try to match up your hand with his in some other way.

On the hand on page 22, for instance, assume that your partner melded nothing and discarded a queen. On the next round you buy an ace. You should now meld 2-A-A, and discard your queen. You should meld the aces because you are searching for a base on which to build a canasta. You should discard the queen because your partner discarded one himself. His queen-discard must have been a singleton because, with your side committed to an out-play, it would have been foolish to break up a pair or a set. Since your partner has no queen left, it would be useless for you to hold on to your queen. At this point you are left with 2-2-9-5-5.

Let us assume that your partner has a pair of aces and one wild card. He now adds them all to your meld of aces. You are now in position to go out if you pick an ace or a 5 or a king, which is a very promising situation so early in the hand. If, however, your next pick is a useless one, you should now complete your canasta and discard whatever you picked. On the subsequent round your partner may meld a set of 9's—and if he does you will be out automatically.

You can see now why you preferred to discard your loose queen on the second round rather than your loose 9. You knew from your partner's discard that he could not possibly help you by melding a set of queens, but he might be able to meld a set of 9's.

### **How to Help Your Partner Play an Out Hand**

Let us now take an example of an Out Hand in which you are the partner of the player who made the original meld. Your hand after the first pick is:

2-Q-Q-Q-10-10-8-7-6-6-5-4

Your partner on the first round has melded 2-A-A and discarded a 4-spot. Your proper play is to meld your three queens and discard a 4-spot too. You cannot help your partner with

aces, so you hope to match his hand with queens, while discarding a card that cannot help a future meld.

On the next round, your partner melds nothing and discards a 7. Obviously, your side is having trouble finding a potential base for a canasta. You should therefore continue to select discards which you know are useless to your partner—in this case, 4's or 7's. On the next round, unless your draw gives you a natural set, you should meld nothing and discard your 7. On this round, partner proceeds to meld 2-6-6. When play comes around to you, you should add your two 6's and your deuce to this meld.

Your side now has a six-card meld, and your partner is left with five cards, two of which are known to be deuces. (Having started with at least four wild cards, your partner must have at least two of them left.) He can now complete the canasta and will still have a deuce left to help in matching up his other cards so that he can go out.

In your rôle as the out-player's partner, you should do your best to make whatever melds are apt to be of help to him. Your primary effort must always be to build the canasta needed to go out. Any wild cards you have should be used toward this end. Once a canasta has been completed, however, if you still have a wild card left, you should try to find some way of using it to be of further help to your partner.

For instance, suppose that your side has completed a canasta in queens and also has four natural kings melded on the table. Your partner, who is the original out-player, has four cards left, at least one of which is known to be a deuce. You have a wild card and a pair of 9's and a pair of 7's as part of your hand. If you are tempted to put your deuce with the four kings in an effort to make a second canasta—resist the temptation! By using your and your partner's wild cards for a second canasta, you would probably wreck your partner's out-play. Your 300-point gain would almost surely be only temporary. It would be much more difficult for your partner to go out if he used his deuces for the second canasta; and the hand would probably continue for a long time. Meanwhile, since both your hands

are very short, you would probably be squeezed into discarding cards that would give the opponents a large score.

Instead of adding your deuce to the kings, therefore, you should meld it with whichever pair is more likely to help your partner. If, for instance, your partner discarded a 7-spot sometime during the hand, but never threw a 9-spot, you should meld 2-9-9. Now, if partner's four cards include at least one 9, he will be closer to out.

### The "Useless Meld" Signal

As you see, it is very important that the partner of the out-player makes every meld that is apt to help the out-player. But he should not make any useless melds. An example will clarify what I mean by a "useless meld." Suppose that you are the partner of the out-player and that your melds include six queens and 2-K-K. If at this point you should add one king to your meld, this would serve no useful purpose whatever. Certainly it couldn't be that you are trying to build a canasta in kings, because if a canasta is to be made at all it will be in queens. Nor would your addition of a king to the king-meld help your partner dispose of any loose card in his hand: if he has a king, he already has a parking place for it. Since melding the king is useless, it would be better to keep it in your hand. You may find it a very convenient discard later!

As a matter of fact, a meld such as a king in the preceding example will never be made by a good player *except as a conventional signal play*. The meaning of this signal is to say to your partner: "Partner, I know that you indicated a desire to play for out with your hand. But it so happens that my own hand developed in such a way that I am ready to go out myself. Just go ahead and use your deuces to complete a canasta and I will go out immediately." The following example will demonstrate the use of the signal:

Your partner started out by melding Joker-Q-Q. Your hand on the first round was:

2-2-K-K-K-10-8-7-7-6-4-4



You melded your kings and discarded the 6. On the next round, your partner melds 10-10-10. You now draw a queen. You can add your 10, making a base, and you could also—if you wished—add your two deuces to the 10-meld in order to help your partner go out. However, you notice that your own hand, after discarding your 8 but keeping your deuces, would consist of nothing but meldable cards. In order to indicate this to your partner, in addition to melding your 10, *you add your queen to the Joker-Q-Q—a “useless” meld.* Your partner should observe this signal and make the canasta himself, whereupon you can go out immediately.

### If the Opponents Freeze

You have seen that in our system an initial meld from your hand at 50 carries a definite, specific message. It commits the partnership to play for out, and this goal should be pursued vigorously regardless of what the opponents may do. If the opponents freeze the pack, you should simply ignore it, and play the hand exactly as though the pack were not frozen. You should still add to each other's melds, put down natural sets, complete a canasta if possible, and discard useless cards. True, you will very probably give the pack away, but you never intended to play for the pack anyhow. It would be very foolish to attempt to fight for a frozen pack, when one player on your side has reduced his hand by melding and holds a number of deuces among the cards he has left. Just play for out and don't bother about the pack. If your opponents get it—well, it was their deuce anyway.

For example, suppose that your partner went down with 2-A-A, and an opponent thereupon froze the pack. Your hand contains a pair of aces. You should add these aces to your meld immediately. Of course, it is tempting to keep this pair in your hand: it would be thrilling if R-O threw you an ace because he figured that you couldn't have any! But, in spite of the fact that a tricky holdup like this may work occasionally, the percentage play is to meld your aces right away. Remember, in our system an initial meld from the hand implies a minimum of four wild cards, so you know that your partner has three

wild cards left after his first meld. By melding your aces, you will produce a five-card meld on the very first round. Your canasta will be completed very early, and your partner should have a good chance to go out quickly. This consideration is much more important than the possible advantage you may get out of fooling your R-O.

### From Out-Play to Play for the Pack

I have stressed the point that once a partnership starts on an out-play, they should continue it and disregard the pack. This means that you should discard useless cards, in spite of the fact that you may be almost sure of giving the pack to the opponents. However, disregarding the pack does not mean that you should refuse to take it if you happen to get an opportunity.

For instance, suppose that you started to play for out by melding 2-A-A, that your partner added two aces and a deuce, and that you completed the canasta yourself. On the fourth round of play, your partner melds 10-10-10, and your hand consists of: 2-2-Q-Q-10-8-4. With your canasta completed, you can go out if you pick an 8 or a 4. Meanwhile, the opponents melded 2-K-K-K, but made no further melds; and the pack has remained intact, containing about fourteen cards. At this point, your R-O discards a 4-spot. You should take the pack, discontinuing your play for out, and adopt instead the tactics for play after capturing a small pack (see page 16).

You gave up a promising out-play because the addition of some fourteen cards to your hand is very likely to produce a couple of canastas, if the hand should continue for more than just a few rounds. The chances are that even if the opponents are the ones who finally go out, you will have scored enough in the meantime to make up for the lost 100-point bonus for going out.

## CHAPTER 4

# The In-Between Hand and the Neither Hand

It would be very easy—perhaps too easy—if, after each deal, you could pick up your hand and say to yourself, “This is a Pack Hand (or an Out Hand), so I know exactly how to play it.” Things are not so simple, however. A large part of the time you will be dealt hands that do not fall neatly into either category. These are In-Between Hands, and those sad ones, the Neither Hands.

### The In-Between Hand

An In-Between Hand may quickly become either a Pack Hand or an Out Hand, depending on your draws from the stock. It contains two or three wild cards, but no set of three of a kind. Here are a couple of examples of such hands:

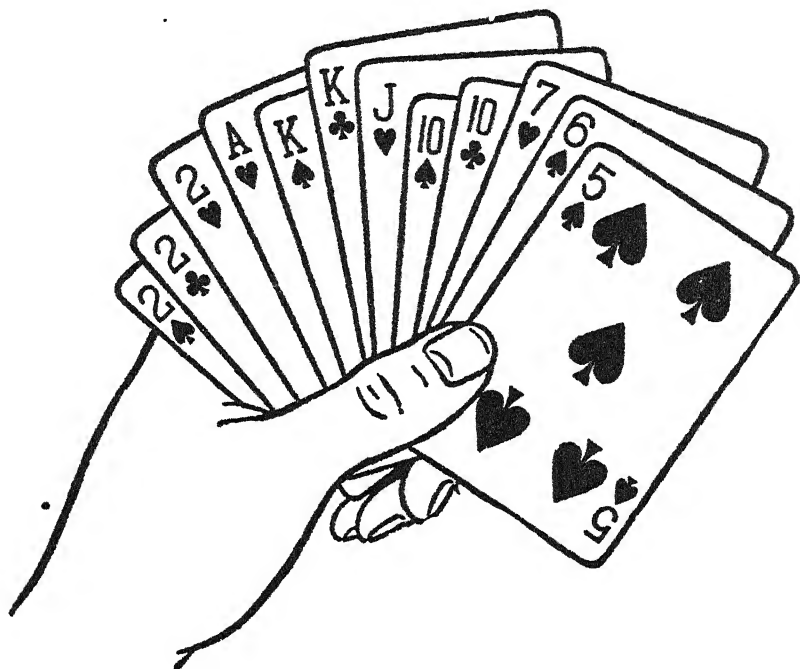
- a) 2-2-2-A-K-K-J-10-10-7-6-5
- b) 2-2-A-K-K-Q-Q-10-7-7-5-4

With an In-Between Hand, you should discard loose cards (singletons) in the early rounds. Later, if you pick enough wild cards to have a total of four, you should start to play for out. If, instead, you pick a card matching one of your pairs, you should break up your set and play for the pack. If your picks from the stock get you neither a Pack Hand nor an Out Hand, simply continue to throw loose cards, up to the fourth round. Of course, if your partner should meld in the meantime, you will assume your rôle as partner of the out-player and make whatever melds are helpful to him.

Holding the hand given in example (a), you could start off by discarding your 5. On the next round, you pick an 8, which happens to be the denomination that your L-O discarded on the first round. Discard this 8-spot. If L-O was advertising, you fell for it; but no great damage has been done because the pack

is still small. If, however, the 8 went by safely and, on the next round you pick a 10 (giving you a set of 10's), you should break it up immediately. If that too goes by, you should commit yourself to a play for the pack.

If, however, you pick a joker, you should go down from your hand—provided that you do not have to meld a set matching a



*A Typical In-Between Hand*

former discard of your partner. For instance, if your partner's first discard was a king and if he discarded other cards subsequently, you should meld Joker-10-10, rather than your kings. As a matter of fact, if your partner has discarded both a king and a 10, you should not go down at all at this point; instead, wait until you acquire a pair that is likely to match some of your partner's cards.

Hand (b) is more likely to develop into a Pack Hand than an Out Hand, because you have only two deuces. For that reason, you should lean toward a play for the pack if circum-

stances permit. Again, you should start out by throwing one of your loose cards, say your 4-spot. Next round, you pick a useless card and discard it, and on the third round you pick a 9. You can see that your hand is not likely to develop into an Out Hand. Therefore, if it is possible to take a first step toward a Pack Hand line of play, you should do so. For instance, if you should reason that a 7 appears to be a safe discard, you should break your pair of 7's with the intention of throwing your other 7 on the next round. From now on, your prime consideration in selecting your discards will be safety alone.

### The Fifth-Round Rule

With an In-Between Hand, you discard loose cards on the first few rounds, so as to build your hand and determine what line of play to adopt. However, it will often happen that none of your early picks develops your hand at all. In this case, if the pack is still intact by the time your fifth round starts, you should follow this very important rule:

*If, at the fifth round, your and your partner's hands are intact and if the pack too is intact, you should play your hand as if it were a Pack Hand.*

This means that you should discard whatever seems safest, regardless of how it affects your hand. You should not go down from your hand, even though by now it may have developed into an Out Hand. And you should freeze the pack if an opponent melds from his hand.

The reason for this rule is simple: By the fifth round, the pack contains over twenty cards and is so valuable that all other considerations become unimportant. If you have just acquired an Out Hand (you couldn't have had one before or you would have melded from your hand), it is too late to start playing for out, anyhow. Even a good Out Hand usually takes at least four or five rounds to put you out. Meanwhile, since playing for out entails discarding loose cards, you are almost certain to give away the big pack. The opponent who gets the twenty-odd cards ought to be able to complete at least two or three canastas very quickly, before you can go out.

As an example, let us say that on the fifth round the pack is still intact, and your hand is:

2-2-2-A-A-K-K-9-9-8-7-7

If you had been dealt this hand, it would seem to have all the makings of a good Out Hand, and you would discard your loose 8-spot as a matter of course. As a matter of fact, you could have melded 2-A-A immediately, because your whole hand is matched up and you are just one deuce short of our requirement of four wild cards. But, as things actually stand, this is the fifth round and the pack is very fat. You should therefore meld nothing and discard whatever you think safe. If, for instance, L-O on his first turn discarded a 9, but threw a dangerous, fresh card on his last play, you can assume that he has no 9's in his hand and discard a 9 from your pair. On the next round, throw your other 9. From then on, discard as safely as possible.

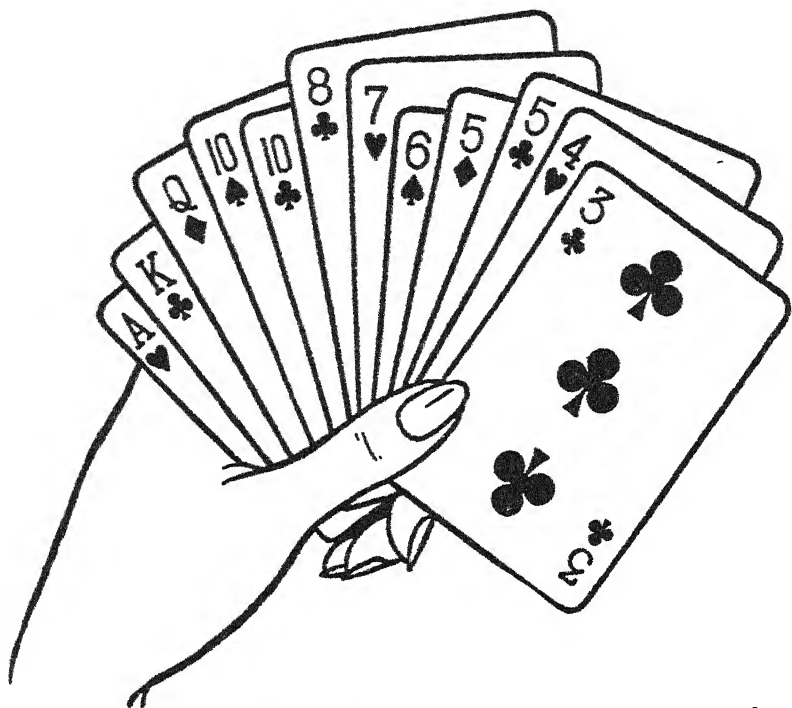
How to select your safest discard will be explained in the next chapter. Now, however, we must take a brief look at those unfortunate hands which we call Neither Hands.

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### **The Neither Hand**

A Neither Hand contains no wild cards; or it may have one wild card but no set of three of a kind. It could, for instance, be a hand such as A-K-Q-10-10-8-7-6-5-5-4-3. Or it could be something like 2-A-K-Q-J-9-9-8-7-6-5-4. If you get a hand like this, you should of course begin by throwing loose cards, matching your partner's discards when possible. It is not important that such discards are likely to give the pack away. With a hand such as yours, you don't mind giving up the pack early. At least, by matching your partner's discards you will be more apt to retain cards that will be helpful if your partner starts a play for out.

However, if you should be dealt a Neither Hand, you should not play it listlessly, just because it is so poor. You should still watch all discards, especially L-O's, and try to remember them. And if, against your expectations, no one has taken the pack for five rounds, the Fifth-Round Rule applies. Of course, if you



*A Typical Neither Hand*

still have no deuce by that time, you cannot freeze the pack if an opponent melds; but all other features of the Pack Hand play should be followed as closely as possible. This is one of the reasons why you should remember as many of the discards as you can. From the fifth round on, you will have to try to discard safely.

## CHAPTER 5

### How to Discard Safely

One of the most exciting situations in Canasta occurs when both sides are struggling valiantly for a large, rich pack. It is past the fifth round, no one has melded from his hand; the pack contains well over twenty cards; and each player sighs with relief when his discard gets by. It is nerve-wracking, but it is rewarding. Whichever side finally pounces on the pack will probably make a killing. The tension mounts from round to round. All players have only one question in mind: "What is my safest discard?"

Of course, black 3's and wild cards are always safe. So are the seventh and eighth cards of a denomination, when six of them are accounted for. For instance, if you know that four kings are in the pack and if you hold three kings in your hand, you know for certain that your kings are 100% safe.

But you cannot expect to hold absolutely safe discards all the time. Usually, you must rely on *relatively* safe discards. There are two ways in which you can estimate the relative safety of discards: (1) by the number of cards accounted for; and (2) by interpreting your opponents' discards.

#### Safety in Numbers

Choosing a safe discard according to number should be done *only as a last resort*, when you have no cards that are safe by inference. The technique is simple enough: You merely add up the number of cards of a given denomination that are in the discard pile to those of the same denomination that are in your hand. For instance, if two kings are known to be in the discard pile and if your hand contains three kings, you can account for five of them; if three queens are in the pack and three queens are in your hand, you can account for six queens—so queens are safer discards than kings. If, however, there are



two denominations that are equally safe, then you should discard the one of which you hold the most. For example:

Suppose that your hand is:

2-A-A-K-K-Q-J-10-10-10-7-7

Aces, kings, jacks and 7's are all dangerous cards, while two 10's and four queens are known to be in the pack. Your L-O has not discarded either a queen or a 10, nor did he let any of these cards go by him during the previous rounds. For these reasons, there is no safety by inference in discarding either a queen or a 10, so all you can go by is safety in numbers. You can account for five queens and five 10's, making it an apparently equal choice. Actually, however, the 10 is a much better discard, because if the first 10 passes your L-O you will have two additional safe discards available for the following rounds.

### Safety by Inference

As you have seen, if a given discard passes by your L-O, then you have an excellent clue that he doesn't have a pair to match it. You therefore assume that subsequent discards of the same rank are safe. In making this assumption, you disregard the off chance that L-O's draw may give him a pair of that rank "on the turn"; or that he may have had his pair previously but without a count of 50. These possibilities are too unlikely to be taken into consideration. We shall therefore regard cards as safe if they passed by L-O at a time when the pack was worth taking.

Also safe by inference are *cards of a rank that L-O discarded earlier, if his subsequent discards were dangerous.*

Suppose, for instance, that it is the seventh round and that previous discards were:

<u>Yours</u>	<u>L-O's</u>	<u>Partner's</u>
Q	6	K
Q	10	10
Q	3	7
3	K	3
6	5	J
6	4	J

As you see from your own discards, you started with a Pack Hand (note your successive discards of queens). L-O threw a singleton 6 on the first round. His second-round discard of a 10 may or may not have been an advertiser. His fourth-round discard of a king matched your partner's previous discard. At the time L-O threw it, you could not tell whether or not it was an advertiser. But by now you should know that it was a singleton, for it would be a very poor and very dangerous play for L-O to discard a 5 and subsequently a 4 if he still had kings in his hand. Both the 5 and the 4 are fresh cards.

Suppose that your hand at this point is:



The inference is strong that a king is safe, and you should therefore discard one of them. Two rounds later, after getting rid of your second king, you will probably have new evidence which will tell you whether a 10, 5, or 4, will be safe then; but right now these cards are extremely dangerous, especially the 4-spot.

*Also, a card may be presumed safe if L-O has discarded three cards of that rank.*

The reason is simple: A player is unlikely to have a five-card set. Therefore, it is reasonably safe to discard a king after your L-O has discarded three kings in succession. However, it is very important to wait for that third discard! Two are not enough. As a matter of fact, if your L-O's last *two* discards were queens, for instance, one of the most dangerous cards in your hand is a queen. No good player will discard a singleton or a pair into a large pack. L-O must be splitting a set of at least three, and therefore must have at least one more queen in his hand. He may or may not have two of them, but it is much too dangerous for you to find out. Better wait one more round until he discards his third queen before following up with yours.

Suppose your hand is: 2-A-A-K-Q-Q-J-8-6-5-4-4, and that the previous discards were:

You	L-O
7	7
9	3
3	10
8	5
10	7
10	K
10	K

You should definitely not throw your king now! Your best discard is an 8, for you got an 8 by L-O before. But even if you didn't have an 8, you still should not throw the king, but keep it in reserve until L-O throws one more. (Note, by the way, that you started out with a Neither Hand and switched to a pack play on the fifth round.)

In finding clues that will lead you to safe discards, it is important to observe the discards of all the players, not only L-O. As a general rule, once the pack has grown very large, all players, even those not playing our system, will try to discard as safely as possible. Therefore, if a completely fresh card appears, say, on the seventh or eighth round, the player who threw it probably split from a set of at least three. Certainly you should take it for granted that your own partner would not throw a

loose, fresh card at this stage, and that knowledge may often help you with your own discards.

For instance, let's say your partner throws an 8-spot—a fresh card—on the seventh round. You have a set of three 8's. You can now account for at least six 8-spots—three in your own hand, one in the discard pile, and at least two left in your partner's hand. On your turn you can therefore throw an 8, knowing that L-O probably doesn't have the "case" pair (the last two 8-spots in the deck).

Another way of gathering clues for safe discards is by interpreting L-O's *position*. Suppose, for instance, that you know it is safe for L-O to discard a king, but that on his last play he discarded a dangerous card. The inference is that L-O doesn't have a king to throw, and that in turn makes it safe for you to throw a king. However, before acting on this type of inference, you must be quite sure that your interpretation is correct. For instance, again let's say that it is safe for L-O to throw a king and that his last discard was a jack. You can assume that it is safe for you to throw a king only if you are *positive* that the jack was, in fact, a dangerous discard. You must be certain that L-O had no good reason to throw a jack. Perhaps you forgot that your partner threw a jack earlier and that L-O interpreted it as a singleton. If that were the case, then L-O's discard of a jack could not be called dangerous; and he may well have thrown it while keeping a pair of kings in his hand.

### When to Discard Wild Cards

An important question that often arises in the middle stages (fifth to tenth rounds) of discarding into a large pack is whether you should discard wild cards. This is not really a freeze, for the pack is, in effect, frozen already. Many players discard deuces into a large pack as soon as they run out of other safe discards, hoping that subsequent picks will ease their situation. As a general rule, such procedure is wrong. True, you should try to keep from giving a large pack away. But it is an ostrich-like policy to discard a deuce without having some other safe discards in your hand. You can't reasonably expect to pick nothing but favorable cards from the stock if the hand still has a long

way to go; nor can you expect your R-O to be kind enough to give you the pack before you have to make a decision as to which of your natural cards to discard. It is much better to take a chance and discard some not-too-safe card *before* you enrich the pack with your wild cards, rather than afterwards. At least, if the worst should happen, it won't be quite so disastrous.

For example, suppose your hand on the seventh round is:

Joker-2-A-A-K-K-Q-Q-9-7-7-7

No 7's have shown up, and L-O hasn't discarded an ace, king, queen, or 9. If you are in this unenviable position, you may be tempted to throw a deuce. But what will you do on the next round, and the one after that? There is still a long way to go before the stock is exhausted (there are fifteen rounds to a hand that is played down to the end). Barring exceptional good luck, you will have to throw some natural card out of your present holding, so you might as well do it now. Discard one of your 7's! If that one goes by, on the next round you may discard a deuce if you wish. For at that point you will have two safe cards in reserve, which you can discard later if necessary. And if the first 7-spot gives them the pack, you will at least have saved your wild card, to help your side in going out and reducing your loss.

### The Last Five Rounds

In the last stages of a big Pack Hand (from the eleventh round on) your discarding should assume a different aspect. Now you can play from round to round, without having to plan in advance. There is no longer any reason to hold on to wild cards, if another choice is at all unsafe. Safety by number is meaningless now (except, of course, if it's the seventh or eighth card of a rank). You should not gamble on not finding L-O with a "case" pair. As a matter of fact, toward the very end of a hand it is more likely than not that L-O does have a "case" pair.

For instance, suppose that your partner discarded three kings during the early rounds. R-O, later on, discarded two of them. You have one king in your hand, and can therefore account for six kings. The end of the hand is near, with the stock con-

taining only a few cards. Where are the remaining two kings? It is unlikely that they are still in the stock. Partner and R-O probably have no more kings either. So they must be in L-O's hand. In spite of the six kings accounted for, it would be very unwise for you to throw a king now. Throw a wild card instead, if you have one.

### Melding for Safety

In the last few rounds of a hand on which you are fighting for a big pack, should you meld from your hand? Such a meld would be counter to our general strategy of playing Pack Hands, but there are times when it is advisable, so as to help your partner.

For instance, with only eleven cards left in the stock, let's say that your hand is:

2-A-A-A-K-K-K-10-10-9-5-5

You have only three more discards to make, including the one on this round. The sixth 5-spot was thrown during the last round, making your pair of 5's useless for offense and safe as discards. You know for certain that you can keep the pack safe until the very end, with your pair of 5's and your deuce for discards. But how about your partner? If he appears to have trouble finding safe discards, it may be very important for him to know that you have three aces. If you meld your aces now, it may relieve his worries. He may, for instance, have two aces himself, and two of them may be in the pack. If that is the case, he will be able to discard his aces with complete safety after you meld yours.

Of course, when you make a meld like this, you are not only helping your partner but the opponents too. Whether or not to meld is therefore a question of judgment rather than theory. But sometimes there are definite indications as to which player is more apt to be in trouble. (One such indication may be that your partner is squirming and moaning every time it is his turn to play.) Perhaps your partner started discarding wild cards on about the ninth or tenth round, and just discarded apparently his last wild card, a big joker. It would seem, therefore, that he had poor luck in picking from the stock. He obviously kept

picking dangerous cards, for if he had picked a safe one he would have discarded it rather than his last joker. In such a case, it is good policy to help your partner by putting down a meld—provided, of course, that you yourself have enough safe discards in reserve to last you through to the end of the hand.

When the stock is low, it is advisable for you to count the number of cards remaining so as to know the number of rounds left to go. Of course, you mustn't forget the red 3's. As you know, red 3's are not active cards at all, and the ones that are still in the stock do not count when determining the rounds remaining. If the stock has twelve cards, and if only two red 3's are showing, you know that, in effect, the stock consists of not twelve but ten cards, and that you will only get two more turns.

## CHAPTER 6

### Freezing the Pack

So far I have mentioned one situation when you should freeze the pack—when you are playing a Pack Hand and an opponent makes an initial meld from his hand. If you freeze then, your side has an excellent chance of getting the frozen pack eventually, primarily because your team's hands are intact while one of the opponents has reduced his. This may not seem sufficient reason to claim that you are the favorites to get the pack: it may be argued that since pairs are necessary to capture a frozen pack, the possession of such pairs would be an important factor. But this argument is only partly correct. Naturally, with a frozen pack, it is better to have pairs than not to have them; but experience has shown that the greater number of cards in one's hand (regardless of whether they are paired up or not) is a more important factor.

Suppose, for instance, that you have melded previously and that your hand now consists of K-K-Q-Q-J-J-10-10. The pack has been frozen by an opponent, and it looks as if you had a promising hand with which to get the pack. Actually, however, this is what is likely to happen: Unless you can grab the pack right away with one of your pairs, you will have to draw from the stock and discard whatever you pick, regardless of how dangerous a card it may be. You may get by with such a discard once or twice, but the chances are that sooner or later you will pick a card that is almost sure to hit your L-O. If that happens, what should you do? If you break one of your pairs, you are giving up one of your chances to get the pack, at the same time taking a risk of giving it up. If, on the other hand, you keep throwing whatever you pick, it is almost impossible for you to avoid hitting L-O. Meanwhile, your R-O, having failed to hit you in the beginning, will have an easy time. All he has to do is match whatever cards you throw, or repeat some of his earlier discards.



On the other hand, if you have your original number of eleven cards, you are more likely to succeed in keeping a frozen pack safe and in ultimately getting it—even if your hand, at the time of the freeze, is poorly matched up. You have more flexibility, because you have a greater choice of discards.

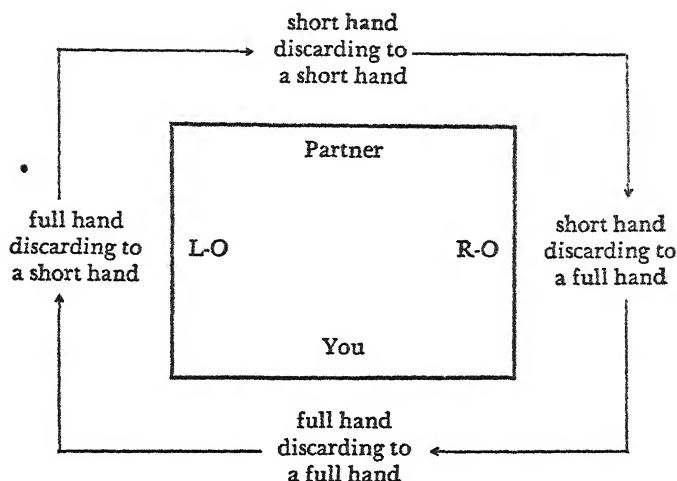
For example, let's say you have Joker-2-A-A-K-Q-10-9-8-7-6-4. It is the third round of a hand on which you started to play for the pack. You have thrown two queens on the first two rounds and, as you see, did not happen to pick up any pairs, meanwhile. Just before it is your turn to play, your R-O goes down, melding A-A-A. You should now freeze the pack, and the fact that you are short of pairs should not deter you. True, you are not likely to get the pack soon, but your side has the advantage nevertheless. You discard your deuce, and on the next round you will throw your last queen. Meanwhile, your partner will throw whatever aces he has. Should he, for example, discard two of them, you will know that your two aces are safe discards even if your L-O does not meld anything. The mere reason that you can probably discard safely for the next few rounds, while your R-O keeps discarding what he picks, makes it likely that you will eventually get the pack. With normal luck in drawing, you will acquire pairs and one of them ought to match one of R-O's indiscriminate discards.

### The Principle of Position

The main factor in the fight for a large frozen pack (at 50-50) is the number of cards in the player's hand. If your opponents are down and you are not, the advantage is with you; if the opposite is true, the advantage is theirs. If both sides are down, the following important principle, called the Principle of Position, will help you determine which side has the advantage.

Suppose your partner and your R-O have both melded four cards from their hands, while you and your L-O have kept your hands intact. The pack is fairly big. If it is frozen now, which side will have the advantage?

To answer this question, analyze the position of the four players. Who is in greatest danger of giving the pack away? L-O is in no trouble. He has a large choice of discards and is



*Illustration of the Principle of Position, showing your right-hand opponent as the one who is on the spot. Your team will have the advantage if you freeze.*

discarding into a short hand; he is least likely to give the pack away. Your partner has only a limited choice of discards, but he too throws into a short hand; he ought to be fairly safe. You yourself are in some danger because you are discarding into a full hand. But you have a full hand from which to throw. The one who is in the worst spot is R-O. Due to his reduced hand, he not only has a limited choice of discards, but he also has the disadvantage of having to throw into a full hand. He, therefore, is the one most likely to crack up eventually.

In the preceding example, your side had the advantage, because the weakest member was one of the opponents. If, however, L-O and your partner had reduced their hands, instead of R-O and your partner, you can easily see that the reverse would be true. If a player with a reduced hand has to discard into a full hand, his side is at a disadvantage.

According to the Principle of Position, if your partner and R-O have reduced their hands, and the pack is intact, it would be advantageous for you to freeze it. But if L-O and your partner are the ones who have depleted their hands, you should

not freeze. By the same token, if an opponent should freeze when you are at a positional disadvantage, you should not fight for the pack, but discard useless cards in an effort to go out.

Situations when both sides are down while the pack is intact are comparatively rare at 50-50, but they occur frequently at other scores, when you will find the Principle of Position very useful. At 50-50, however, the following sequence of events is necessary to produce such a situation:

Your partner, playing for out, went down from his hand. You were unable to help him and therefore made no meld. One of the opponents made an initial meld from his hand instead of freezing the pack. If that opponent was L-O, you should continue with your original line of play and try to help your partner go out, because the Principle of Position tells you that you are at a disadvantage in fighting for the pack. If, however, it was R-O who went down, the positional advantage is with your side, and you may do well to freeze the pack, switching from a play for out to a play for the pack.

### Don't Re-Freeze!

Freezing the pack in situations described so far is a weapon of offense. I have shown its use to gain an advantage, when the prospects are favorable. But I do not recommend the freeze as an offensive weapon once you *have gained* the advantage by capturing the pack. In other words, I never employ what is known as the re-freeze.

The re-freeze is used by many players after capturing a large, frozen pack. The idea behind it is that a player who has acquired a great number of additional cards in his hand will be a strong favorite to capture the re-frozen pack too. As far as his chances of getting the next pack are concerned, the idea is quite correct; but that is true whether or not this pack is frozen. The best way to press your advantage after having acquired a large number of cards is by trying to attain control, as described in Chapter 1. Re-freezing may get you there, but it may not. Remember, to gain control, your partner must acquire additional cards; and one way for him to take a pack is by adding a card thrown by an opponent to one of your melds. But if the

pack is frozen, he is not allowed to take the pack merely because there is a "player" on top of it. As a consequence, it will frequently happen that you will be the one to capture a second, frozen pack instead of your partner. Of course, such a capture will be profitable, but not as profitable as if your partner got it.

An additional disadvantage of the re-freeze is that on some hands—where the opponents have a good chance for a quick out—they may succeed in going out before you even have a chance to grab the second pack. If that happens, the re-freezer will actually lose points on a hand that looked like a big one. In our system of exploiting a big capture, the pack is never re-frozen. That makes it easy for us to take a pack any time we wish. If the opponents threaten to go out, we take the pack and meld all the canastas we can. At least we will assure ourselves of a moderate gain thereby, in case the opponents do manage to go out immediately.

To summarize: At 50-50, the offensive freeze should be used only as a means to gain an advantage. You should freeze when the opponents have melded and you have not; and in the rare cases when both sides have melded and your side has the positional advantage.

Freezing should also be used sometimes as a defensive measure, as you shall see in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### On the Defensive

As soon as an opponent captures the first pack and thereby increases the number of cards in his hand, you should consider yourself to be on the defensive. This means that you should not make a deliberate effort to get the next pack, but play for out instead. The main reason for abandoning play for the pack is that the capturing opponent, merely by acquiring cards from the pack, has several safe discards. He now owns cards that he has discarded successfully before, and probably a few black 3's also. If you are on his left, these will be the only cards that you will see for a while. He, therefore, is extremely unlikely to give the pack away, and that fact alone makes it likely that his side will get it again.

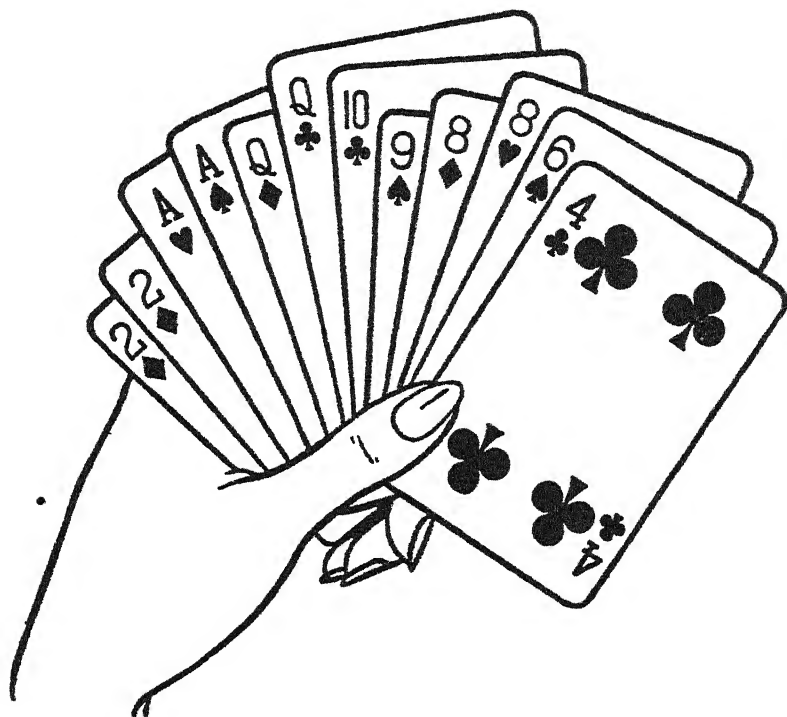
Your objective in this situation is to play for out, and it does not matter whether your hand is a Pack Hand or not. Once a sizable pack is lost, there is no percentage in trying to get even. The best you can do is to minimize your losses.

Defensive out-play differs greatly from the voluntary out-play that takes place when you or your partner is dealt an Out Hand. When playing for out voluntarily, you could draw certain inferences from the mere fact that a play for out was attempted. For instance, if partner went down with 2-A-A, you could infer that he had three wild cards left in his hand. Here the situation is different. You play for out because you must, not because you want to. But in this defensive attempt, partnership coöperation is just as important as in voluntary out-play.

You and your partner's main job in playing for out is to match up each other's hands. If you hold cards that you know your partner cannot match, they are useless and you might as well discard them. On the other hand, you should hold on to cards that may appear useless to you, if there is a good possibility that they may help your partner. For example:

Your partner just gave the pack away by throwing a 9 on top

of a twenty-five-card pile. R-O took it, melding Joker-9-9, and acquired several 4's, 5's, 6's, 7's, and kings. (You may not remember exactly how many of each rank R-O has, but you know it is about four or five of each.) The 9, by the way, was the first of its kind to appear. Your hand after the pick is:



Your job, obviously, is to get out as quickly as possible. Let us see how you go about it.

Of all the cards in your hand, the only two that you know to be useless in matching up your partner's hand are the 6 and the 4. You therefore discard one of them immediately—the 4-spot, let us say. The fact that the 4 will help your opponent build a canasta should not deter you from throwing it; more important than trying to stop the opponents from getting cards valuable to them is to *keep* cards valuable to *your* side. Note that the 9 is a valuable card for your side in spite of the oppo-

ment's meld of Joker-9-9, because your partner must have at least two more 9's in his hand.

Before discarding your 4-spot, you should not make any meld. You do not know yet where to use your two deuces to the best advantage. Keep them for future use, depending on what your partner does.

Let us now look at your partner's hand. At the time he gave the pack away, it consisted of:

2-2-A-A-Q-Q-Q-10-10-9-9

(You can deduce that he probably has no 4's, 5's, 6's, 7's, or kings—ranks thrown before—for he would have thrown one instead of a fresh 9-spot.) Partner now picks an 8-spot. He too does not know yet how best to use his wild cards, and he therefore does not put down a meld. But his hand is a well-connected one, and he can see that he will be the one more likely than you to go out once things start moving. He discards his 8, because he cares less about matching a possible set of 8's you might have than he does about keeping his hand intact.

We now return to your hand. You pick a jack. So far, the only information you obtained is that your partner has no 8's left in his hand. But you still don't know enough about your partner's hand to make your first meld. All you know is that there is no use in keeping your pair of 8's, so you discard one of them.

On the same round, your partner picks a jack and discards it. You then pick a 9-spot. By now, you know that partner's possible hand is limited to aces, queens, 10's and 9's—with 9's being a practical certainty. You therefore make your initial meld, putting down 2-9-9, 2-A-A. From now on, forget about going out yourself and make whatever further melds may be helpful to your partner.

As you can see by looking at your partner's hand, his out-play now is in fine shape. With a favorable pick, he may go out right away. If he picks a 10, he will complete a canasta in aces, meld his three queens, his three 10's, and add his two 9's to your meld and go out. A similar result would occur if he picks a wild card, ace, or 9. But let's say that he actually picks a useless card. He melds two aces, two 9's and three queens, discards the card

he picked, and leaves himself with 2-2-10-10. If either you or he can add a sixth card to one of your five-card melds (aces and 9's), he will be out immediately. He also has the additional chance of picking a 10 himself or of your putting down a meld of 10's.

To summarize, defensive out-play follows these rules: The out-player conserves one or more wild cards, to be used with pairs in his hand. He discards any cards that are not matched up in his hand, whether they be cards that may help his partner or his opponents. He melds a natural set. He does not add more than one wild card to the potential canasta. The partner of the out-player does not discard cards that may be helpful to his partner, but tries to match his partner's discards. As soon as a base is found, he adds as many wild cards to it as he can. He too puts down natural sets. In his choice of discards, he selects cards that are least valuable to the opponent.

### Which Partner Should Try to Go Out?

In the preceding example, the division of the rôles was clear-cut. You were the helper, and your partner was the out-player. At other times it may not be so obvious. Both players may be trying to go out, and it may be more difficult to recognize which of the two should injure his own out-play to help his partner. But most of the time the players will be able to adopt some of the plays just described.

Here are some examples that will help you interpret your proper rôle:

Your side has a five-card meld of aces. Your partner adds one deuce to that meld, melds a natural set of 10's, and leaves himself with three cards, discarding a card that will give the opponents a canasta. Obviously, he is the one who wants to go out. He probably has a deuce and a pair left in his hand. You should therefore complete the canasta if possible, even though you may have to use a wild card for that purpose and thereby injure your own out-play. You should also make a relatively harmless discard at this point, because with a strong probability of your partner going out immediately, you certainly do not want to give anything good to the opponents.

As another example, let us assume that you melded three aces, leaving yourself with: 2-2-Q-Q-10-10-9-9. Your partner adds an ace and two deuces, but makes no further meld. The indication is that he is merely trying to help you, for his own hand could



not be sufficiently matched up to offer a good play for out. You know that he has no natural set or he would have melded it; and he is not apt to have enough deuces left to take care of pairs, after having used two deuces on your aces. You should therefore consider yourself the out-player. You should not complete the canasta yet, but wait instead until either you or your partner draws an ace or a wild card. If he does it soon, you will be able to go out by picking either a queen, 10, 9, or wild card.

### The Defensive Freeze

There are many situations during the defense of a hand when it is advisable to freeze the pack. A defensive freeze has a totally different character from the freeze discussed in the previous chapter. There, freezing was an offensive weapon that had as its aim the capture of a pack. But defensive freezing is used to ease the pressure on your team, and its objective is to keep the opponents from taking packs until the hand is exhausted.

Freezing in defense is used when the opponents have put down a number of melds and have thereby reduced their hands to such an extent that you can reasonably hope to avoid hitting the pairs left in their hands.

As an example, suppose that L-O captured a very big pack and immediately put down practically all his meldable cards. He melded a canasta in 4's, six 5's, five 6's, five 7's, five kings, four aces, and three queens—leaving himself with twelve cards. R-O, at his first opportunity, completed a canasta in 6's and added an ace to the four aces, leaving himself with eight cards. It would be good strategy for you to freeze at this point; and actually such a move would more properly be called a "semi-defensive" freeze. With the opponents' hands reduced to twelve and eight cards respectively, you have a good chance to capture the pack if the hand continues long enough. What will probably happen is that the opponents will not get the pack again, but will, after completing one or two more canastas, go out. Your freeze will have stopped them from accumulating a really large score, and they will beat you only by about 1000 to 1400 points.

In this example, the opponents melded a great deal even before you showed any signs of going out. Their play was poor and counter to our own methods of exploiting a large pack. That

is why you were given the opportunity for a semi-defensive freeze. Against really good players, this rarely happens. But the purely defensive freeze can often be used even if the opponents play well.

When the opponents have good reason to fear that you may go out quickly, it is wise for them to cash in—to complete canastas with wild cards and add natural cards to their short melds. Once they do that, you should consider a defensive freeze. In spite of the fact that you or your partner are close to out, the actual going out may take a long time. Meanwhile, you want to be able to discard opponents' players without letting them take the pack on every round.

For instance, suppose your side has a canasta in 10's and your partner is down to six cards. Your own hand is: 2-A-A-J-J-6-4. The opponents just cashed in by completing canastas in 4's, 5's and kings, and by adding to their melds of 6's, 7's, and aces to bring these melds up to six cards each. By freezing the pack, you will be able to throw an ace, a 6, or a 4 without giving L-O the pack. Your partner, too, can throw their players in complete safety. He will be able to pursue whatever out-play he has without having to give the opponents valuable cards.

As a general rule, you should freeze defensively only after your side has a canasta; and it is preferable to freeze with a hand that has only a poor play for out. Always remember that the only sure way of stopping your opponents is to go out yourself, and that a freeze is inadvisable if it hurts your chances of doing so. As long as you do not have a canasta you can't go out, and a deuce will be more valuable in building a canasta than for freezing.

Defensive freezing without a canasta is advisable only in the very last stages of a hand, when you know that you can discard safely until the very end if the pack is frozen. For instance, suppose that there are only twelve cards left in the stock. The opponents have long melds in 6's, 7's and aces. Your longest meld is 2-10-10-10-10. Your partner has nine cards, and you hold: 2-A-A-J-J-7-6. If you add your deuce to your 10-meld, you may help your partner go out, but since he has so many cards this is unlikely. If you freeze instead, you will be able to

keep the pack safe until the very end, for your L-O will not be able to take your aces, your 7 or your 6. It is also a practical certainty that your partner, too, has some of their players in his hand and will be able to discard them safely until the hand is over.

To freeze defensively is the job of the helper, not the out-player. The out-player needs his deuces for his pairs. You should therefore not freeze if your hand is: 2-2-J-J-9-9-7. Your out-play is too promising. Instead of freezing, you should simply discard whatever you pick in the hope of finally drawing a jack, 9, or wild card. You may have to discard cards that will give your opponents canastas; but you should even do that rather than freeze. You hope your partner will be able to freeze; but you should resort to a freeze yourself only if the stock is almost exhausted.

## CHAPTER 8

### Cashing In

Now that we have seen what problems confront the defensive team, it will be easier to determine when the offensive team should cash in by completing canastas with wild cards and by making other melds. As you know, you should cash in when there is a serious threat of the opponents' going out. Let us see how to recognize this threat.

If the opponents have not melded at all, or if they have melded but do not have a base, the threat of their going out is practically negligible. Therefore, you should not use any wild cards on your melds, and you should keep enough cards in your hand to make it futile for them to freeze. A good rule of thumb is that each partner should keep at least three more cards in his hand than his L-O.

For instance, suppose that the opponents have no base, but that both have melded, leaving themselves with five cards each. You and your partner should keep all your wild cards, but should meld whatever natural cards you have, as long as you each retain at least eight cards. You want to wait until you know where your wild cards will do the most good; and you can afford to wait because the opponents obviously cannot go out quickly.

Once the opponents have a base, there is some danger of their going out. One way to estimate that danger is by counting the number of cards of the rank of their potential canasta and the number of wild cards still out. For example, suppose that the opponents' only meld is A-A-A-A. If your own hand contains four aces, it is obvious that the opponents will have trouble completing their canasta and going out. They will have to use three deuces for the canasta, and probably will not have enough deuces left to go out quickly. On the other hand, if you have no aces and if your partner does not meld a set of aces (he should do it if he can—he certainly won't discard them) then you know

that there are a few aces left in the stock for the opponents to pick. Consequently, you should recognize that there is some threat of their going out, although it may not be imminent.

In deciding whether to cash in while there is no immediate threat, you should be guided by the possible gain as against the possible loss. For instance, if you hold three wild cards and have many short melds on the table, the longest one being K-K-K-K, the most you can gain by cashing in is the 300-point bonus for one canasta. On the other hand, if you hold up your wild cards, you and your partner may add natural cards to some other short melds on subsequent rounds. Your three deuces may be used to make two or three canastas instead of one. In addition, you may pick a few kings and possibly even make a natural canasta in kings. But if you use your deuces on your kings now, you not only lose a chance for a natural canasta bonus, but you also may be unable to complete other possible canastas. Altogether, holding up the deuces may gain you as much as 800 points or more.

A situation when you *should* cash in, in the face of a mild threat by the opponents, is the following: Your opponents' melds are: A-A-A-A, 2-Q-Q. Your own melds include 2-2-Q-Q-Q-Q. You might as well complete a canasta in queens by adding a wild card even though you do not think your opponents are going out soon. It will be wasted only if you pick the case queen, which is unlikely.

It is only *after* the opponents have completed their canasta that you should consider their threat serious enough to cash in all the way. "All the way" means making all possible canastas, but it does not mean going out yourself.

When you have a choice as to which of several possible canastas to complete, you should be guided by mathematical percentage. For instance, if you have a natural six-card meld of jacks, and a meld of 2-2-Q-Q-Q-Q, and if no other queens are showing, the percentage play is to put your deuce on the jacks rather than on the queens. This may sound paradoxical, because you give up a chance for a natural canasta. But with only a few more rounds of expected play, it is much more likely for you to pick a queen than a jack. With four queens missing

as against only two jacks, the odds are two to one in favor of a queen.

There is another situation just as threatening as a completed canasta by the opponents: When the defenders have a six-card meld, and one of them has clearly shown that he is ready to go out once the canasta is completed. For instance, if one of the defenders is down to three cards and has been persistently throwing dangerous cards, it is a fair assumption that his three cards are matched up and that he is only waiting for a canasta. With their six-card set, one favorable pick by either opponent will end the hand, and you should therefore cash in all the way.

## CHAPTER 9

### Play at Scores Other Than Fifty-Fifty

So far in this book, I have discussed Canasta strategy and tactics only at the beginning of a game (or near the beginning) when both sides have an initial meld requirement of 50. Of course, most of the tactics you have learned—how to gain control, how to play for the pack or for a quick out, what to do when you are on the defensive, etc.—apply at other score levels too. However, as you will discover in this chapter, your general strategy differs considerably at different score situations. (As I mentioned before, in referring to these various initial-meld requirements, I will simply say 50-120, etc., the first number being your side's initial meld requirement, the second being your opponents'.)

#### 50-120

When the score is 50-120, the opponents are far ahead of you in points scored; but you have a considerable advantage on the hand you are about to play. There are two ways of exploiting this advantage. One is by trying to go out before the opponents have a chance to meld, thus setting them back a few hundred points. The other is by trying to play for the pack and a big score. In deciding which plan to adopt, you should of course be guided by the make-up of your own hand. But there is another factor which is just as important, and that is the actual point score at the beginning of the hand.

Suppose the opponents' score is 4600, while yours is 700. If you play for a quick out and succeed, you will probably score around 700 points and the opponents will be set back some 400 points (assuming each side has one red 3). Your net profit will be 1100 points and, as an additional advantage, you will start the next hand under the same favorable melding requirements—50-120.

But if you play for the pack and succeed in running up a big score, the hand will necessarily be a long one. Taking a moder-

ately optimistic view, you can expect to score about 2000 points. The opponents, meanwhile, will probably be able to make their initial meld and complete one canasta, scoring around 500 points. Your net gain will be 1500—a nice comeback, but the game will be over. There will be no second hand to be played with an initial advantage.

By the same token, it is easy to see that if the opponents' score is 3200 or so, it would be unwise for you to play for a quick out and set them back under 3000. With that score, you should make every effort to play for the pack.

If the opponents' score is between 3500 and 4300, their making one canasta will not finish the game, nor will a setback put them below 3000. With a neutral score such as this, your choice of strategy should be determined entirely by the make-up of your own hand, veering toward a Pack Hand play if possible.

Play for the pack, as you know, means safe discarding. The art of discarding safely when the opponents need 120 differs considerably from when they need 50. At 50-50, you assumed that a player had the count early in the hand. If you threw a card that your L-O did not take, you inferred that he did not have the necessary pair. But at 120 it will frequently happen that a player has the pair but cannot take the pack because he lacks the count. A few rounds later, he may acquire the count, or his partner may go down; and he will then be able to take the pack if the same card is thrown to him.

Thus cards that have passed by L-O before cannot be considered absolutely safe, but just moderately safe. On the other hand, cards that L-O himself discarded are very likely to be safe, since a player can rarely afford to advertise when his side needs 120 (especially if his opponents need 50). Other reasonably safe cards are all the low ones; they are not likely to help an opponent complete his 120 count.

With the outlook on safe discards thus changed, there will be many more hands with which you can expect to keep the pack safe. At 50-120, many In-Between Hands and Neither Hands can qualify as Pack Hands. You don't need to break up a set of three any more to prepare safe discards. All you have to do is to match L-O's previous discards and throw low cards.



With a hand such as:

2-A-K-Q-10-9-9-8-6-6-5-4 (a Neither Hand at 50-50) you can play for the pack in the following fashion: On the first round, take a chance and discard one of your high cards, say the king. From then on, throw your low cards, beginning with your singletons and if necessary your two 6's later. If possible, match L-O's discards. Don't go down from your hand, and freeze the pack if they go down. (It would be better if your partner did the freezing; but if he doesn't, you should.)

Of course, if you are dealt a Pack Hand, you play it exactly as you would at 50-50. With an In-Between Hand, you should start off the same way as before—discarding loose cards until the hand develops. However, you should switch to a pack play earlier—about the third round, instead of waiting for the fifth round.

For instance, with 2-2-2-A-K-K-Q-9-8-5-4-4 start off by discarding your loose queen and follow it up with your 5. Assume that your next two picks were an 8 and a jack, and that L-O discarded an 8 on the first round. You should not discard any more loose high cards, but break your pair of 8's instead, with the intention of throwing the other 8 on the next round. You still have two low cards (4's) which are reasonably safe to throw later. If necessary, you can even discard one or two of your deuces—throwing wild cards is not too dangerous because at 50-120 your side is automatically a favorite to get the large pack.

With really promising Out Hands, you should play for out as before, *except* when the opponents' score is in the low 3000's, when you don't want to set them back below 3000. In this case, throw your loose high cards very early—the first or second rounds—and then discard several of your wild cards, leaving only one joker or two deuces, so as to clear your hand for the pickup of pairs. Once you have replaced your wild cards with natural ones, you will have a good chance to discard safely by matching L-O's discards, throwing low cards, repeating previous discards, etc.

When the opponents' score is above 4300, however, you should make a deliberate effort to play for out. With that kind of score, all hands that previously qualified as Out Hands should be

played as such, and so should some In-Between Hands. For instance, suppose the score is 1000 to 4500, and your hand is:



Make your initial meld immediately, putting down Joker-A-A, 7-7-7, and discard one of your high cards, say the queen. The hand shows only fair prospects of a quick out, but with good coöperation from your partner and a few lucky picks you may go out within four or five rounds. If the opponents meanwhile do not succeed in going down, you will have picked up some 1000 points or so, at the same time keeping the opponents at the 120-level while you will need only 90 on the next hand. If the opponents manage to go down but do not make a canasta, your net profit will be pretty small; but at least you will have stopped them from finishing the game and will have forced them to play another hand under conditions unfavorable to them.

## 50-90

Play at 50-90 is not much different from play at 50-120. Again, the emphasis is on playing for the pack, even on hands only fairly suitable for pack play. The difference is one of degree rather than method. In discarding, for instance, you can match L-O's discards, but you cannot feel quite as confident about getting these cards by as you would at 50-120. Low cards are only moderately safe. On the other hand, cards that pass by L-O will usually be safe to throw on subsequent rounds.

For these reasons, your *decision* as to whether to play for the pack or for out should be based on the same reasoning as at 50-120; but the *tactics* of playing for the pack should resemble your tactics at 50-50. For instance, holding

Joker-2-A-K-K-Q-10-7-7-5-5-4

you should plan to play for the pack. You should discard a loose high card, say your queen, on the first round; but on subsequent rounds you should split a set of three if you acquire one, or match L-O's discards if you don't acquire one. You should not discard your loose 4-spot at a later stage if no 4-spots were thrown by L-O (such a discard would be proper at 50-120); instead, split some of your pairs if they appear to be safer discards.

Unlike the strategy at 50-120, you should not go to extremes in converting an Out Hand into a Pack Hand. If you get a clear-cut Out Hand, play it as such. Don't be afraid of setting the opponents back below 1500. The difference between needing 50 and needing 90 isn't great enough to worry about. If you succeed in going out quickly before the opponents have a chance to meld, a net profit of about 1000 points will be a very satisfactory result, even if the opponents are put below 1500.

A good estimate of the value of a lower initial melding requirement is that the difference between 90 and 120 is worth about 400 or 500 points, while the difference between 50 and 90 is worth only about 200 points. Therefore, if you have a choice of giving the opponents a score of either 2800 or 3100, you should select 3100; but if you have a choice of giving them 1400 or 1700, you should select 1400.

## 120-50

With this score, you should consider yourself on the defensive right from the start. There is no hand that would justify a determined play for the pack. Even if you have the count, and even if you can provide yourself with several safe discards, the opponents will still be favorites to get the pack if the struggle becomes prolonged. After all, you can never know whether or not your partner has the count. Most of the time he won't have it. If he doesn't, you will be fighting alone against two opponents. While *you* may keep the pack safe, your team nevertheless will be at a disadvantage in competing for the pack, because your L-O is automatically safe regardless of whether or not his discards hit your partner.

At 120-50, your tactics from the very beginning should resemble defensive out-play. You should match your partner's discards, disregard the pack, and, as a general rule, meld from your hand as soon as possible. In putting down your initial meld, you should try to use cards that are likely to match cards in your partner's hand. The only time you should delay putting down an initial meld at 120-50 is when you have to use cards that your partner can't possibly match. For instance, holding:

Joker-2-A-A-K-Q-Q-J-10-9-8

on about the third round, you should go down with Joker-A-A, 2-Q-Q—but *only* if your partner has *not* previously discarded an ace or a queen. If he has thrown a queen, for instance, you should wait until you pair up some other of your high cards before going down.

In going down at 120-50, the most important consideration is to meld in such a way as to promote a play for out. The number of cards that you use is not important, and you should not be afraid to leave yourself with only one or two cards if necessary. If you can come down with Joker-K-K, Q-Q-Q, 7-7-7-7, do so at once, even though you will have only one card left. With this meld on the table, if your partner can add enough cards, you will be in a promising position to go out. Your partner may easily have cards that will complete a canasta right away (for instance, one 7 and two deuces, or three deuces, or two queens and two

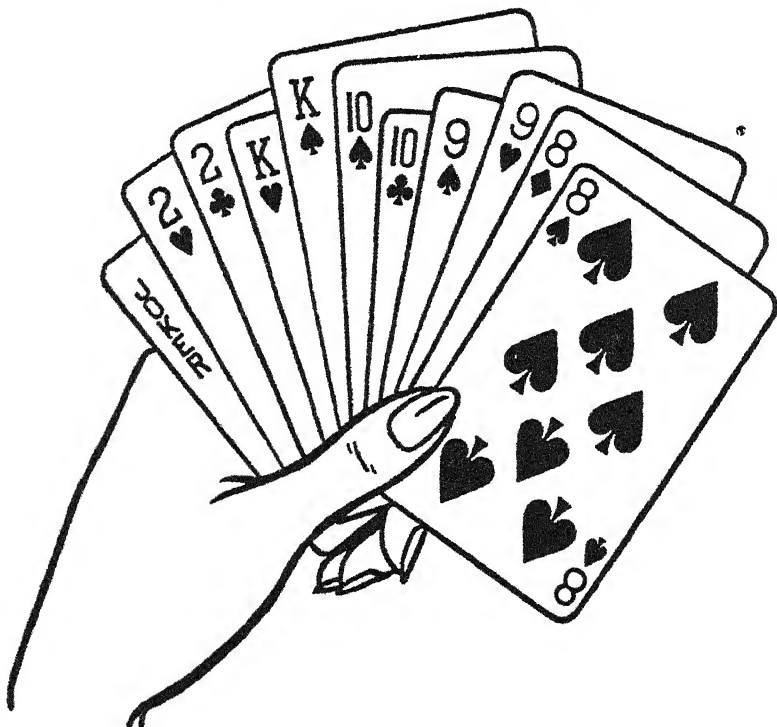
deuces, etc.). And even if he can supply only enough help to produce a six-card meld, you will have a chance to pick that seventh card yourself, which will immediately put you out.

You should consider economy in melding only when you have a wild card or two to spare, since you want to know where best to use them. For instance, holding

Joker-Joker-2-A-K-K-10-10-8-5-4

you should come down with your two jokers and one of your pairs, say kings. Don't make the 2-10-10 meld at the same time. First find out whether your partner can match your kings. If he can, then your deuce may better be used to complete a canasta in kings, rather than to meld with your 10's. If, however, your partner cannot match your kings, and if subsequent discards make it appear probable that he has a pair of 10's, you can then meld your deuce with your 10's.

On the other hand, you should deliberately meld more cards than necessary in a situation like this. Your hand is:



Your partner previously discarded an 8-spot, but has never thrown a king, 10, or 9. You should come down with Joker-K-K, 2-10-10, 2-9-9, in spite of the fact that you could have met your count of 120 by using less cards (for instance, Joker-2-K-K, 2-10-10). It is not important whether you leave yourself with four or only two cards in your hand, since you have no reasonable chance to get the pack in either case. But as far as playing for out is concerned, the larger meld is preferable because it gives your partner a chance to match three melds rather than two. If your partner can match just one of your sets with enough cards to complete a canasta, you will need only an 8 or a wild card to go out.

At 120-50, what should you do if you can't manage to assemble the count and if your partner doesn't come down either? Just discard useless cards and match your partner's discards, keeping your hand as well connected as possible. If the opponents have taken the pack meanwhile, don't be afraid to throw their players, even if they help the opponents build a canasta. Your only hope is that you or your partner will eventually be able to go down. If you keep your hand well connected and matched up with your partner's hand as far as possible, then you will be able to go out quickly once one of you succeeds in going down.

If your hand does not have the count and if an opponent melded *without* taking the pack, it may be good strategy for you to freeze. For instance, suppose that it is the fourth round of play, and that your R-O went down with 2-Q-Q-Q. Your own hand is:

2-2-A-K-K-K-J-10-9-9-8-7

Assume also that 9's figure to be safe discards for you if the pack is frozen. Your best play now is to freeze, for the following reasons: Your partner probably will not give up the pack, since he is discarding into a seven-card hand; you yourself are prepared with two safe discards on the next two rounds, and may easily find additional safe discards for subsequent rounds. If your partner meanwhile should acquire the count and go down, your side will have the benefit of a positional advantage (see

page 42) with R-O's short hand discarding into a long one. Of course, if neither he nor you acquires the count, you may lose the pack eventually; but in that case you were bound to lose a big hand anyway. Your freezing tactics cost you an additional deuce, but it was a good investment because it gave you a chance to turn a bad hand into a good one.

Note that at the time you froze the pack your deuce was not of much value to you. There was little chance of your getting the count unless you picked a joker, and with a joker you would have the count without your deuce. It would be different, however, if your hand contained one joker instead of two deuces. In that case, you would be close enough to the count to make it unwise to expend your joker for freezing: instead, you should discard whatever seemed safest in the hope that your partner would either make the initial meld or freeze the pack.

### 90-50

Play at 90-50 follows the general line of 120-50. Again, you start the hand at a disadvantage and therefore shape your play for out. But, whereas there is no hand at 120-50 which justifies a determined play for the pack, some exceptionally good hands are suitable for pack play at 90-50.

For instance, suppose that your hand on the second round of play is:

Joker-Joker-K-K-K-Q-10-8-5-5-4-4

With this hand, throw a king, just as you would when playing for the pack at 50-50. Admittedly, your strategy is a risky one, for it may happen that even after the fifth or sixth round (while you are keeping the pack safe) your partner may not have the count and therefore could not take the pack even if he were hit. But as a rule, five or six picks are enough to acquire a count of 90. If your partner succeeds in doing so, you will be fighting for the pack under equal conditions for both sides, whereas you started the hand at a disadvantage.

The hand in this example was an unusually favorable one because it contained two jokers and two low pairs. Most of the

time, however, hands at 90-50 should be played for out. You should go down quickly, without bothering too much about the number of cards used in your initial meld, so long as you are fairly sure that your melds will match your partner's hand, and so long as you don't meld wild cards where they are likely to be wasted.

### When Both Sides Need 90 or 120

When both sides need at least 90, a factor comes up which we have not yet encountered. It is the *use of an initial meld as an aggressive weapon toward the capture of a pack*. Up to now, I advised putting down an initial meld from your hand only when you were playing for out, whether by choice or by necessity. When you need 50 and are playing for the pack, there is no advantage in being down because 95% of the time your partner has the count anyway; whereas there is a disadvantage in reducing your hand, particularly if the opponents freeze. However, when both sides need 90 or 120, the advantage of being down while the other side is not can far outweigh the disadvantage of reducing your hand, even if the pack becomes frozen. This is especially true at 120-120.

When making an initial meld in an effort to get the pack, the most important consideration is economy. The fewer cards you use, the better. You intend to fight for the pack, whether or not it is frozen, and for that purpose you need as many cards as possible. For instance, at 120-120, holding Joker-Joker-2-K-K-Q-Q-10-9-7-4, you should go down with Joker-Joker-pair, rather than with Joker-K-K, Joker-Q-Q. You don't care whether or not the pair you select matches your partner's hand, since your only object in melding is to provide the count.

By the same token, if your partner has come down with an economical meld, you should not rush to add to his meld or put down sets of your own. For example, suppose your partner went down with Joker-Joker-K-K. Both sides need 120, and your hand is:

2-A-K-K-Q-J-10-9-9-5-5

Regardless of whether or not the opponents freeze, you should



meld nothing and discard one of your 9's. You want to keep the maximum number of chances to take the pack. If the opponents don't freeze, it will be almost impossible for them to keep the pack away from you for long, because you can take six different cards (K, Q, J, 10, 9, 5), and your partner certainly has a number of chances himself.

Now let us see what is likely to happen if the opponents do freeze. Your partner, having only seven cards, will probably have to discard loose ones, but his L-O won't be able to take the pack since he doesn't have the 120 count. You have a larger choice of discards, and will probably succeed in keeping the pack safe. You will match L-O's early discards, or follow up with more 9's, or, if necessary, throw your 5-spots. Meanwhile, the opponents, in trying to build up their count, will necessarily discard loose cards and (unless they are very lucky) one of these discards should hit you or your partner.

Returning to your hand: Should you discard your kings, assuming they are safe? The answer is that you should delay such discards as long as possible, because you don't want to burn your bridges. After all, it may happen that five or six rounds will go by without your getting the pack. By then, one of the opponents, or maybe both, may well have acquired their count. Suppose, for instance, that your L-O, some five rounds later, goes down with Joker-A-A-A-A. From this point on, your side has no advantage in the struggle for the pack. If anybody should grab it, it is more likely to be the opponents, for they have the positional advantage. Realizing that, you should add your two kings and your deuce to your meld so as to give your partner a chance to go out. You kept your two kings for just such a contingency.

Of course, you should not hold on to your two kings at the price of discarding too dangerously. For instance, suppose that six rounds have gone by since your partner melded. Your L-O discarded three kings, but you still have your pair. However, you are out of absolutely safe discards, and at this late stage it is unwise to gamble on L-O not having the count. Therefore, you should now start discarding your kings. You deprive yourself

of one chance to get the pack and also of a chance to help your partner go out; but with such a rich pack, nothing matters as much as not giving it away.

### Initial Melds at 90-90 and 120-120

The most economical melds possible are Joker-A-A at 90, and Joker-Joker-pair at 120. These melds may be put down while maintaining a good play for the pack. But when more than four cards are necessary to make your initial meld, it may become difficult to maintain your play for the pack. It is therefore not always correct to put down an initial meld as soon as you can, if it requires six or seven cards. In deciding whether or not to put down your initial meld, you should be guided by the following rules:

1. *Three- or four-card meld:* Make it immediately. Partner retains his entire hand and fights for the pack as long as possible.

2. *Five- to seven-card meld:* Put it down only if its make-up is such that a quick switch from pack play to out play is feasible. Partner retains his entire hand for at least three rounds if the opponents don't go down. If they do go down or if, after three rounds of play, the opponents appear to be able to keep the pack safe, partner makes whatever melds will help you go out.

3. *Eight- to ten-card meld:* Put it down immediately if no more economical way is possible, and if it contains at least one natural set of three. Partner immediately makes whatever melds are helpful to achieve a quick out.

Here are some examples to clarify these rules:

a) 2-2-2-A-A-K-Q-Q-10-7-7

With this hand at 120-120, you *could* go down melding 2-A-A, 2-Q-Q, putting your third deuce with one of these melds, say aces. But you have to use seven cards for your meld, leaving yourself with only four. If, as is to be expected, the opponents freeze the pack, and if they manage to keep the pack safe for several rounds, you may want to switch to an out play. But that may be difficult unless partner happens to match you specifically in aces.

In the early stages of the hand you had no indication of whether or not your partner was likely to have aces. Therefore, you should not go down with this hand immediately, but wait until you pick a natural set or until partner's discards show you that he is very likely to match your hand (for instance, if his first four discards were K, J, 10, 9).

b) 2-2-2-A-A-A-Q-Q-J-9-9

With this hand, you should go down immediately with an initial meld of 2-A-A-A, 2-Q-Q. Again, you are using seven cards, but if a quick conversion to out-play should become necessary, you are fairly well prepared. All your partner needs is just one ace and a deuce; or the equivalent, and you will be in a good position to go out quickly.

c) 2-2-2-A-A-K-K-K-10-10-9

With this hand, you have a choice of whether to meld by using eight cards or nine cards. You *could* come down with eight cards by melding 2-A-A, K-K-K, adding your two deuces to either meld. This would leave you with three cards—not enough to fight for the pack. It is preferable to use the less economical way of melding, but putting down 2-A-A, K-K-K, 2-10-10, retaining a deuce and an odd card. Again, you have little chance for the pack, but you have given yourself a maximum chance to go out.

It goes without saying that even in cases when you have melded down to three cards or less, your partner should take the pack if he can, regardless of whether or not he can help you with your out-play. The main objective in going down at 90 or 120 is to help your partner get the pack. The only reason that we consider the suitability for out-play in a meld at all is to allow for those cases when partner *cannot* get the pack and when further developments put our side on the defensive.

### Meld or Freeze?

When an opponent makes his initial meld and your side is not down, the pack, of course, is open to them but in effect frozen to you. If they come down early, say on the first or second round, you should at first discard useless cards in an effort to build your count. But if two or three rounds go by after their meld and the

pack still remains intact, you simply have to do something to equalize the situation. You must either meld or freeze the pack. Of course, if you haven't got the count, you have no choice: you must freeze before the pack gets too big (sixteen cards). If you can meld instead, you should do so if it leaves your side with the positional advantage (if your L-O is the opponent with the short hand). Your only problem arises when you are able to come down, but it would put you at a positional disadvantage. In that case, proceed in the following way: Meld in spite of the positional disadvantage if it can be done in such a way as to offer a reasonably good chance for a quick out. If that is impossible, then freeze instead.

For example, at 120-120, suppose that R-O went down early in the hand with Joker-A-A, 2-Q-Q. The pack remained intact until the fourth round, when you picked a deuce. Your hand now is:

Joker-2-2-A-K-Q-Q-J-10-10-9-8

You should *not* come down with Joker-Q-Q, 2-2-10-10. Such a meld would put you at a positional disadvantage; and if you lose the pack, as is probable, your play for out would be very doubtful. It is poor policy to stake everything on the chance that your partner has a pair of 10's or queens, in view of the fact that two queens have appeared already. Instead of melding, you should freeze. You are depriving yourself of the count, but you are likely to get it back soon; and if R-O should throw a 10, or if he should hit you with some pair you acquire later, the top card will be enough to make up your count. Remember that your R-O, with his short hand, has a small choice of discards; and if you keep the pack safe he will probably give it to you.

On the other hand, suppose the situation is the same as in the preceding example except that your hand is:

Joker-2-K-K-K-K-J-J-10-10-9-7

(You just picked the joker.) You should meld K-K-K-K, Joker-J-J, 2-10-10, and discard your 7. You don't intend to stage a long fight for the pack. If your meld helps your partner take the pack quickly, good. But if he cannot take it, he can probably help enough to enable you to go out very quickly.

### When to End the Game

When considering the actual point score, we stated that the difference between needing 90 and needing 120 is worth an estimated 400 to 500 points. For that reason, it is profitable to invest some 300 points in order to avoid having to play a hand at 120-90. Accordingly, if your own score is such that you can end the game while the opponents' score is under 3000, you should do so, even if you have to sacrifice around 300 points.

For instance, suppose that you started the hand with a score of 4100 to 2400 in your favor. Both sides have melded a canasta and you have two five-card melds. Neither side has a red 3. You have a choice of using a wild card either to promote a second canasta or to go out. You should add up the point score of your melds and choose to go out if that will win the game for you. Although you may give up a chance for a larger score, you thereby protect yourself against the possibility of the opponents' going out, and starting the next hand with the score about 4900 to 2900.

On the other hand, since there is no bonus for winning a game, there is no incentive to end it if *both sides* are over 120. Accordingly, if in the above example the opponents' score was around 3500, you would be well justified in prolonging the hand. If your action proves right, you may gain about 600 points; if it proves wrong, all you can lose is some 300 points—the difference between your going out or their going out, plus the point score of your melds. But those 300 points or so are all you can lose. The fact that you did not end the game has no bearing whatever, because you will start the next hand on equal terms. There is no reason to assume that they will be luckier than you on the next hand.

As you have seen, the play when both sides need at least 90 is radically different from play at lower scores. The most important new factor is the use of the initial meld as an aggressive weapon to get the pack. Another important difference is the frequent application of the Principle of Position. The relative safety of discards also changes, with more emphasis on matching L-O's discards and on low cards. But many other important aspects of the game are essentially the same at all scores. There is no important difference in the tactics of exploiting the capture of a large pack, in defense against opponents who captured a large pack, nor in the later stages of play with an intact frozen pack. To be sure, some new problems may pop

up, but these can easily be handled by anyone who has understood the techniques described so far.

### Final Advice

- If you have studied and thoroughly understood these pages, you are now able to play Canasta by system, instead of by guess-work. Your game will still be flexible, but it will have logic and consistency. You know what you are trying to do and how to go about it.
- Now that you know the system in theory, try it out in practice—if possible, with a partner that knows the system as well as you do. You will find that the techniques will become almost automatic. You will also find how much *easier* it is to play Canasta when you know what your partner has and what he is trying to do. It is my hope that the Culbertson System of Canasta will reduce to a minimum those famous squabbles between partners over such things as "Why didn't you freeze the pack?" or "How did I know you had queens?" etc. If you and your partner carefully follow the system, you will know just about what to do in almost any situation.

Do not think that this will make the game "cut and dried." Every hand of Canasta can change with the single draw or discard of one player—and this happens sixty times in a hand played all the way through the stock. The advantage of playing by the system is that the mathematical probabilities behind your plays have already been taken into account, so as to make the odds in your favor.

Once you and your partner have practiced the system until you know it well, you are ready to take on any pair of Canasta experts. You, now, are experts too. Other factors being equal—if you can remember discards as well as they can, for instance—you will come out ahead in the long run, and probably sooner.

One last suggestion: Get a partner and try out the Culbertson System of Canasta on your friends right away, so as to win as much as possible before *they* learn the system too!

## CHAPTER 10

### SAMBA (Three-Deck Canasta)

Several variants of Canasta have cropped up in the past year. There is Uruguayan Canasta, Chilean Canasta; there is Three-Deck Canasta and even Four-Deck Canasta. None of them, in my opinion, is as good as the standard, two-deck, partnership game. All of them lack an important feature of regular Canasta—a balance between offense and defense. There is less room for strategic planning, psychology and probabilities. But, to be sure, there is more room for luck—and therefore, for gambling. Perhaps that explains, at least in part, the current popularity of these variations, particularly the one played with three decks of cards, called Samba.

If you like novelty and variety, and would like to try a game that is wilder and woolier than Canasta, Samba should be your dish. Not only do you have 162 cards to worry about, rather than 108; and eighteen wild cards rather than twelve; you also have to pay attention to the suits—which, of course, are ignored in Canasta, although they are a regular feature of most other rummy games.

Samba has now attained a standard status of its own, with official laws, which are set forth on pages 95-96 of this book. It is very easy to learn, since the rules of play do not differ substantially from those of standard Canasta. The strategy, however, is radically different from the Canasta strategy I have just described. First, here are the rules:

#### How to Play Samba

Samba is played with *three regular decks and six jokers*, rather than two decks and four jokers as in Canasta. Like Canasta, it is usually played as a four-handed game, with two partnerships.

Each player is dealt *fifteen cards*, instead of eleven. On each turn to play, you *draw two cards*, and discard only one. These two cards are drawn as a unit; you may not draw one card and

then take the pack; nor, having taken the pack, may you draw one card.

You must have *two canastas* in order to go out. And a canasta may not contain more than *two wild cards*. In fact, no meld may contain more than two wild cards (as against three in Canasta). Nor may you add wild cards to a completed canasta.

The bonus for going out is *200 points*, instead of 100 as in Canasta. There is no bonus in Samba for going out concealed.

For each red 3 faced, you get the usual bonus of 100 points—*but only if you have completed two canastas*; if you don't have two canastas by the time the hand ends, you are debited 100 points for each red 3. If you face all six red 3's, you get a bonus of 1000 points (provided you have your two canastas; otherwise you are debited 1000 points).

A game consists of *10,000 points* instead of 5000 points.

The initial meld requirements are the same as in Canasta up to 5000 points. Thereafter, if your score is under 7000, your initial meld requirement continues to be 120. From 7000 points on, the initial meld requirement is 150.

The rules for taking the pack in Samba are slightly different than in Canasta: You may never take the pack with a single matching card and a wild card in your hand. Frozen or not frozen, you may always take the pack with a matching natural pair in your hand. If not frozen, you may also take it if the top discard matches a meld you already have on the table. However, you may not take the pack if the top discard matches a completed canasta of yours, unless you also happen to have a matching natural pair in your hand.

The feature that is most intriguing about Samba, however, is the novelty—the sequence canasta. This consists of seven natural cards of the same suit, in sequence, such as the K-Q-J-10-9-8-7 of spades. Black 3's cannot be used in a sequence canasta, nor may wild cards be used. The bonus for a sequence canasta is 1500 points.

A sequence canasta (sometimes called a samba) may be melded single-handed or through partnership coöperation. One player must meld at least three cards in sequence, such as J-10-9 of hearts. His partner then may add one or more cards on either



side of the meld; the original melder may also add cards, etc.

Cards melded in an effort to make a sequence canasta cannot be switched around to combine with other melds. For instance, if K-Q-J has been melded and the partnership also has six kings on the board, they may not use the king from the sequence to make a canasta of kings.

You may take the pack if the top card will play on a sequence your side has melded on the board, provided the pack is not frozen. If you have 10-9-8 of spades melded, and the top discard is the 7 of spades, you may take the pack. But you may not take the pack if the top discard could be melded with a sequence you have in your hand. For example, if you hold 10-9-8, or 10-9, of spades in your hand, and the top discard is the jack of spades, you cannot take the pack.

Aside from these rules, Samba is played the same as Canasta. But, as you will see, these few new rules make a totally new game out of Samba.

### Samba Strategy vs. Canasta Strategy

Samba strategy differs radically from the strategy you use in regular Canasta. Your emphasis in Canasta is on playing for the pack; you resort to the alternative—the play for out—only as a defensive measure. But in Samba the pack is not nearly so important, for the following reasons:

1. Because of the two-card draw, you continually increase the number of cards in your hand, even if you never capture a pack.

2. With fifteen cards dealt originally, and their number constantly increasing, you rarely get squeezed.

3. For the same reason, it is relatively easy to build the necessary two canastas in a very short time; once this is done, both partners have a good chance to draw out quickly. On the average, at 50, it will take a coöperating partnership no more than the first seven rounds in order to go out, *even if neither of them captures a pack*. In Canasta, on the other hand, a partnership sometimes has to struggle for out all the way to the end of the stock.

The relative unimportance of the pack has two effects: First, you almost never take small packs; nor do you take medium-sized

packs indiscriminately. Second, you never *plan* from the start to play for the pack.

When taking a six-card pack, if you have to use three cards to take it (say a king is on top and you get it with 2-K-K), you will acquire five new cards from the pack. After discarding, and taking into account the three cards you used, your net gain will be one additional card in your hand—exactly the same as if you had drawn. (Remember, you draw two cards at a time.) Taking a pack of less than six cards actually reduces the number of cards in your hand. The same considerations apply, of course, if you must use six cards to get a nine-card pack (for instance, at 90, when a king is on top and you go in, using 2-K-K, 2-Q-Q to make up your 90).

This does not mean that you should always pass up small or medium packs. If some cards in the pack (at least two) match up with your hand, take it! But a pack of no more than eight cards which are useless to you should be passed up. Note how different this situation is as compared to Canasta!

In Canasta, when you take even a small pack, you acquire two important advantages. First, by having made your initial meld, you open the pack for your side, enabling you to take it with a single card and a deuce. In Samba, an initial meld does not open the pack; you still need a natural pair to take it. Second, in Canasta, *any* pack of, say, eight cards is of value, since you acquire cards you can safely throw in your fight for the next pack—cards that L-O threw and cards that you threw which passed by him. In Samba, things are different. Even if you manage to keep the pack away from the opponents, the resultant gain is not apt to be large; they will probably go out before you amass a big score. Furthermore, cards that passed by L-O before and therefore are considered fairly safe discards in Canasta, are not nearly so safe in Samba. Here a player draws two cards at a time, and there are twelve cards of each rank (as against eight in Canasta). It is therefore quite common for a player who lacks a certain pair at one point to have it two or three rounds later.

It is primarily this fact—the ease in drawing pairs—that makes a play for the pack unprofitable in Samba. In Canasta, when you have a Pack Hand, you break up a set of at least three, for dis-

cards. If the first goes by, you have a reasonable assurance that your next discards from that set will get by also. In Samba, with L-O's hand changing rapidly, this strategy will fail far more often than it will succeed. In the first place, even in the early rounds of play, it is better than even money that a set of three in your hand will match a pair in L-O's hand. But even if it doesn't—if you discard a king, for instance, from a set of three kings and L-O can't take it—the fact that he will draw *two* cards on each turn will make it quite probable that he will have a pair of kings two or three rounds later.

So, breaking up a set and following it up is not good Samba strategy. Instead, as a rule, you should keep your sets, meld early, and play for a quick out. In discarding, throw useless cards and match L-O's discards. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, the main one being on hands with a fair prospect of a sequence canasta. But first let us discuss the more common hands, where no such prospect is present.

### Playing for Out

As soon as you can go down from your hand with two natural sets of three or more, you should do so. Similarly, you should take even a small pack if it enables you to meld two natural sets. At 50, you should usually be able to do this fairly early in the hand. But if you can't, don't go down too soon by using your wild cards with pairs. Remember, in Samba you need a *five-card* base.

For instance, suppose on the third round you hold:

Joker-2-2-A-A-K-K-K-Q-10-10-10-7-7-6-5-5-4

*(See illustration on opposite page)*

You go down with K-K-K, 10-10-10, and discard the 4. You will be left with:

Joker-2-2-A-A-Q-7-7-6-5-5

Your partner's melds and your subsequent draws should help you go out fairly quickly.

But if you hold:

2-2-2-A-A-K-K-Q-J-10-10-9-7-7-6-5-5-4-4

you should not go down by using deuces with your pairs. Instead, wait for your partner to go down, so that you can help him go out; or wait to draw natural sets.

In coöperating with your partner in an effort to go out, the same principles apply as in Canasta. The player with the better chance for out should keep wild cards for his pairs, while the other partner uses his wild cards to aid in completing the two necessary canastas. In order to know which partner is in better shape to go out, it is necessary for the player with the good Out Hand to meld as much as possible (while maintaining his out-possibilities). This should be a signal to his partner to try to complete the canasta. The reverse is also true: the player with a poor Out Hand should not make unnecessary melds.

Suppose your hand is: Joker-2-A-10-9-7-7-5-5-4

Your melds are: K-K-K-K-K, 2-Q-Q-Q-Q, J-J-J, 10-10-10

Your partner has eight cards. You should add one of your wild cards to the queen-meld, completing a canasta, and add



your other wild card to the king-meld, almost completing a canasta. But you should not add your 10 to the 10-meld, as that would not help your partner. A "useless" meld, remember, is a signal that you are close to out. In this case, you aren't.

However, if on the next round you pick a 5 or a 7 (or both) you should meld your set. This is a useful meld, since its object is to help your partner find a parking place for any 5's or 7's he might have.

Here is an example of a good out-play:

The melds on the table are the same as given above. But your hand is:

2-2-2-10-9-8-8-8-7-6-6

You should meld 8-8-8, use only *one* wild card (best to put it on the kings), *meld your 10*, and discard the 9, leaving yourself with: 2-2-7-7-6-6. The "useless" meld of the 10 will tip off your partner that you are nearly ready to go out. He will complete the canastas if he can. Next round, unless you draw two useless cards, you will be out.

### Later in the Game

At higher initial-meld levels (90, 120, or 150), it will not always be so easy to put down a desirable initial meld, although the task is not nearly so difficult as in Canasta. Again, you should not put down pairs with wild cards, but wait instead until you acquire at least one set of three or more.

For instance, at 90, you hold:

Joker-2-2-A-K-K-Q-Q-J-10-9-9-8-8-7-6-4-4

You should not make an initial meld from your hand. Wait until you can take a worth-while pack, or until you draw a natural set. Discard a useless card, preferably one your partner has discarded before (your 6, say). Your partner draws and discards a queen. On the next round, you draw a king and a queen. You still should not meld, because you don't want to waste your wild cards on melds that may not grow up to be bases. Obviously, there is no fit in queens. So you wait another round, discarding your 7-spot.

On the next round, you buy an ace and a 9. You now meld:

K-K-K, Q-Q-Q, 9-9-9, discarding the 10.

Your hand now is: Joker-2-2-A-A-J-8-8-4-4. There is a good chance that your partner will help you sufficiently in kings and 9's to give you a good play for out.

### The Sequence Canasta

The only hands on which you should not play for out are those containing a good chance for a sequence canasta. A "good chance" means that you must have at least five cards in a suit that could be filled into a seven-card sequence, including at least two of the vital "middle cards." Note that *every* sequence canasta must include the 8, 9, and 10. If, for example, your hand included Q-10-9-7-6 in spades, you would try for a sequence canasta. You would watch for the jack and 8 of spades. If one of them were in the pack you would, of course, grab it, if you could. But if you should see two or three of these vital cards melded on the board, you would abandon your play for a sequence canasta and play for out instead.

Whenever your sequence holding includes the 10-9-8 (and you have at least two cards in the neighborhood), you should meld the 10-9-8. This will warn your partner not to discard an adjacent card, but to add it to your meld.

A word of caution: Don't be too stubborn in trying for a sequence canasta. It isn't worth it. If you haven't made any progress toward your sequence for three rounds or more, consider the possibility that your opponents may go out soon. If your side has a good chance for out, switch to that line of play, even though it spoils your play for the sequence canasta.



# OFFICIAL CANASTA LAWS

## ABOUT THESE LAWS

The 1951 Laws which follow are the *only* Official Laws for Canasta, recognized as such by leading Canasta writers, players and tournament directors, not only in America but in Argentina (where our version of the game originated), and used throughout the world. These Official Laws are published in nearly all countries.

The changes from the 1950 code will be welcomed by all Canasta players: they consist principally of clarifications of previously doubtful points, together with a considerable lightening of the penalties. Generally, the entire code has been greatly improved in phraseology, making the laws easier to understand. The principal changes deal with the following situations: insufficient meld; black 3 as the up-card; red 3 as the last card of the stock; number of wild cards in a canasta; number of melds of the same rank; and a player holding one card when there is a one-card discard pile and the stock is exhausted. The rules for giving and receiving information have also been liberalized.

But all players should note well that one law remains unchanged: If the top discard matches a completed canasta of yours, and the pack is not frozen, you *may* play the top discard on your completed canasta and take the pack.

Two-handed Canasta has undergone a major change from the 1950 code, in that the prescribed procedure now is to draw *two* cards at each turn, and discard one. This version has proved much more popular than the previous one-card draw, and has become official in the 1951 code.

Three-deck Canasta (Samba) has also attained official status with the new code, which includes laws for this newcomer in the Canasta family.





# Official Canasta Laws

*Compiled and Promulgated by*

NATIONAL CANASTA LAWS COMMISSION

*U. S. A.*

NATIONAL CANASTA LAWS COMMISSION

*Argentina*

*Adopted by*

*Regency Club, New York City*

*Association of American Playing Card*

*Manufacturers*

## FOR FOUR PLAYERS

### THE GAME

1. Canasta is a game of the rummy family. A game consists of one or more deals or hands, and terminates at the end of any hand in which a total score of 5000 points or more is attained by one or both sides. The side with the higher score wins the game. Should both sides have identical scores the game is a tie.

### THE CARDS

2. The canasta pack consists of 108 cards, made by adding four jokers to two standard 52-card decks.

### THE DECK

3. The players cut for partners, seats, cards and for first play from the shuffled full pack. For the purpose of the cut the cards rank: ace (highest) K-Q-J-10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2 (lowest). The suits rank: spades (highest) -hearts-diamonds-clubs (lowest). If two players cut identical cards, they must cut again to break the tie; but this in no way affects their position with the other two players. If, in cutting, a player draws a joker, or exposes more than one card, or draws one of the four cards at either end of the pack, he must draw again.

4. The player who has cut the highest card may choose any seat, and the player who has cut the second-highest card sits opposite him. The other players take the remaining seats. The players who sit opposite each other are partners for that game.

5. a. The player who has cut the highest card has the privilege of first play. The player who sits at his right deals. After the first deal, the turn to deal passes clockwise (to the left).

b. Any player may shuffle the cards, the dealer having the privilege of the final shuffle. The player at the dealer's right must cut the deck before each deal.

*In South American countries, the turn to deal and play passes counter-*

*clockwise (to the right), and South American references to dealer's right or left are the reverse of those in this edition.*

6. a. Eleven cards are dealt face down one at a time to each player in rotation, beginning with the player at dealer's left and proceeding in a clockwise direction. The forty-fifth card, called the up-card, is faced upon the table and begins the *discard pile*. The rest of the pack is called the *stock* and is placed next to the up-card.

b. If the up-card is a joker, a deuce, a red three, or a black three, the top card of the stock is turned up crosswise to cover it; and this process is continued, if necessary, until some card other than a joker, deuce, red three, or black three is turned up.

c. A player may not look at or pick up his cards until the deal has been completed. The deal begins with the completion of the cut and ends when a proper up-card has been turned up.

#### *Deal Out of Turn*

7. a. Should a deal out of turn be discovered before the beginning of the first play, the deal stands and the first play is made by the player whose turn it would have been if no irregularity had occurred. In this case, the deal passes as though the cards had been dealt by the correct player.

b. Should a deal out of turn be discovered after the beginning of the first play, the deal stands and play continues from that point. In this case, the deal passes as though the irregular deal had been correct.

#### *New Deal*

8. There must be a new deal if:

a. It is discovered during the deal that the cut was omitted.

b. The dealer, during the deal, exposes any card other than the correct up-card.

c. It is discovered before each player has completed his first play that:

1. any player was dealt an incorrect number of cards.

2. a card is found faced in the stock.

3. a foreign card is found in the pack or in a player's hand.

Should such a discovery be made after each player has completed his first play, the play continues without correction (exception, see law 32c).

#### ORDER OF PLAY

9. The players play in turn, beginning with the player to the left of the dealer. A play consists of three parts:

a. the draw

b. the meld

c. the discard

#### *The Draw*

10. a. A player draws when he raises the top card of the stock or discard pile from its former position.

b. In drawing, a player at his turn to play always has the right to take the top card of the stock and add it to his hand. Under certain conditions he may instead take the discard pile (see laws 13b2, 14a and 14b). The choice is fixed, and a player commits himself to draw as soon as he touches

either card, unless either accidentally or obviously for the purpose of straightening out cards in disordered arrangement; or if he puts cards down on the table, for the apparent purpose of taking the discard pile.

c. When a player has established his right to take the top card of the discard pile, the remaining cards in the pile become part of his hand, except as provided in "d" below.

d. If a player should forget to take all of the pile, it is the duty of all other players to call attention to the oversight. He retains his right to those cards until the next player has drawn, whereupon they become part of the new discard pile. If a red three or wild card is left in this manner, the pack remains frozen (see law 17).

### *The Meld*

11. a. At his turn to play a player may place three or more cards of the same rank face up on the table or may add cards to groups already placed on the table by his side. These groups are known as *melds*, and the act of placing them on the table or adding to them is known as *melding* (see laws 12, 13, 14, and 15). A player may meld more than one such group at one turn to play.

b. A side may meld in a rank that has been melded by the opponents but may not make two separate melds in the same rank. Should it do so, laws 11g, 27b4 and 28b apply.

c. A player may not add cards to his opponent's melds.

d. When melding, a player may use a joker or a deuce (called *wild cards*) as a card of any rank. However, each meld must contain at least two natural cards (as distinguished from wild cards) and may not include more than three wild cards (see law 27b4).

\* e. A card is melded as soon as it is placed face up on the table with evident intent to meld. If the exact location of a melded card is in doubt, any player may ask that the meld be clarified.

f. Cards of a discard pile joined to cards in a player's hand may be melded at that turn to play.

g. A card legally melded may not be returned to the hand or discarded; and may not be shifted except that it is compulsory to join two melds of the same rank. (If the merged meld contains more than three wild cards, laws 27b4 and 28b apply.)

h. If a player melds a card illegally, he may shift it at that turn to play in any way that will make the meld legal (see law 29). If he cannot legalize it, law 27 applies.

i. All melds for a partnership are kept in front of one of the partners, and no distinction is drawn between those made by one partner and those made by the other.

### *Melding Values*

12. At the end of each hand cards melded are credited as follows:

	Points
Each joker .....	50
Each ace or deuce.....	20
Each king, queen, jack, ten, nine or eight.....	10
Each seven, six, five, four, or black three.....	5

A joker or deuce that represents a natural card in a meld retains its original point value.

Unmelded cards are deducted at amounts equivalent to their melding values.

### *The Initial Meld*

13. a. The minimum count requirements needed for a partnership's first meld are:

Partnership Score when hand begins	Points Required
Minus .....	15
0 to 1495 .....	50
1500 to 2995 .....	90
3000 or more .....	120

b. The first meld (initial meld) for a partnership may be made only when the cards melded total at least 15, 50, 90 or 120 points depending upon the partnership's score at the beginning of the hand. A player may meet the minimum count requirement with more than one group of matching cards, provided he puts them all down at one turn to play. The first meld may be made in one of the following manners:

1. After drawing from the stock, by laying on the table properly melded cards with a value equal to or greater than the minimum count requirement.

2. Before drawing, by laying on the table two or more natural cards that match the top card of the discard pile so that the count of these cards (and of other melds from the hand, if necessary) plus the count of the top card of the discard pile equals or exceeds the minimum requirement.

c. Bonus points for red threes (see law 21f) or canastas (see law 15b) may not be used in reaching the minimum count requirement. Penalties other than the insufficient count penalty in no way affects the minimum count requirement. They are subtracted at the end of the hand.

### *Subsequent Melds*

14. a. After a player has melded and has completed his play, either member of that partnership may at a subsequent turn to play take the discard pile:

1. By putting down from his hand two or more cards of the same rank as the top card of the discard pile.

2. By putting down from his hand one wild card and one card of the same rank as the top card of the discard pile. (Exception: See law 14b.)

3. By adding the top card of the discard pile to a meld (whether or not that meld is a closed canasta) already made by his side. (Exception: See laws 14b and 14c.)

b. When the discard pile contains a wild card (deuce or joker) or a red three, it is said to be a *frozen* pile. A player whose turn it is to draw may take a frozen pile only by putting down from his hand a pair of natural cards that match the top card of the pile. For the initial meld, the player must at the same time meet the minimum count requirement (see law 13).

c. A player who holds only one card in his hand may at no time take a discard pile consisting of only one card.

### *Canastas*

15. a. A *canasta* is a meld of seven or more cards of the same rank, including at least four natural cards and not more than three wild cards. The seven cards of a *canasta* may be put down as a single play or may be accumulated during more than one play.

b. When the play of a hand comes to an end, each side scores bonuses for its *canastas* as follows:

500 points for each *natural* *canasta*, consisting solely of natural cards;

300 points for each *mixed* *canasta*, containing one to three wild cards.

A *canasta* bonus has no effect on the minimum count required for a partnership's first meld.

c. A *canasta* should be piled in a stack with only the top card visible. A red card should be left at the top of a natural *canasta*; a black card (if available), at the top of a mixed *canasta*.

d. A *canasta* may be inspected only:

1. From the time it is completed until the next player has discarded.

2. When a player attempts to add one or more wild cards to it.

3. At the end of the hand.

e. A player may:

1. Add extra matching or wild cards to a *canasta* at his turn to play, provided the *canasta* never contains more than three wild cards. The addition of a wild card to a natural *canasta* changes it to a mixed *canasta*.

2. Take the discard pile at his turn to play if the previous discard matches one of his side's *canastas*. (Exception: See laws 14b and 14c.)

### *The Discard*

16. a. A card is discarded when a player separates it from the rest of his hand with evident intention of discarding it, provided he places it on the discard pile or holds it in such a manner that his partner sees its face.

b. A player, at each turn to play, must complete his play by making a discard and must retain at least one card in his hand after doing so. (Exception: See laws 18a and 21e.)

c. When a card has been discarded it may not be returned to the player's hand. (Exception: See laws 21j, 31b and c.)

17. a. The first wild card or red three that enters the discard pile should be exposed at the side of the rest of the pile or placed crosswise on the pile.

b. When a player discards a wild card, the next player may not take it at that turn; and if the pack is not already frozen, such a discard freezes the pack.

### *Going Out*

18. a. When a player melds every card in his hand, play ceases. The player so *going out* need not make a discard.

- b. A player may go out only when the partnership, then or earlier in the hand, has completed a canasta.
- c. A bonus of 100 points is awarded to the side that goes out.

#### *Going Out Concealed*

- 19. a. A player goes out *concealed* when he:
  - 1. Melds his entire hand, including at least one canasta, at one turn (without having made any previous meld); and
  - 2. Does not add to any meld previously made by his partner.

A player who has put a red three on the table does not thereby lose the right to go out concealed. When a player goes out concealed, he need not make a discard.

b. The bonus for going out concealed is 200 points (instead of, but not in addition to, the normal bonus of 100 points for going out).

c. A player who draws from the stock and goes out concealed need not meet the minimum count requirement.

d. A player may take a discarded pile of one or more cards and go out concealed provided he can establish his right to the pile in the normal way. The player must meet the minimum count requirement unless his partner has already melded.

#### *Black Threes*

20. a. If the up-card is a black three, the top card of the stock is turned up to cover it (see law 6b), but the pack does not thereby become frozen.

b. When a player discards a black three, the next player may not take the discard pile at that turn.

c. A player may meld three black threes or four black threes (but no wild card may be melded with black threes) from his hand when going out at that turn, but at no other time.

#### *Red Threes*

21. a. If the up-card is a red three, the top card of the stock is turned up to cover it (see law 6b).

b. If a player is dealt one or more red threes, he must place them face up on the table at his first regular turn to play and replenish his hand from the stock. If he draws another red three in replenishing his hand, he places it face up on the table in the same manner and replenishes his hand again. He proceeds to make his regular draw as soon as his hand contains eleven cards, of which none is a red three. If a player fails to replenish his hand for red threes, his right to do so ends when the next player draws or puts cards down on the table for the apparent purpose of taking the discard pile.

c. If a player subsequently draws a red three from the stock, he places it face up on the table and replenishes his hand from the stock.

d. If a player takes a discard pile containing one or more red threes, he places the red threes on the table, but does not draw to replace them.

e. If the last card of the stock is a red three, the player who draws it places it face up on the table. He may neither meld nor discard, and the hand ends.

f. When a hand ends, a partnership that has made any legal meld

is awarded a bonus of 100 points for each of its red threes and an additional bonus of 400 points (or 800 points in all) for four red threes. If the partnership has not made a meld, these same amounts are subtracted from the partnership score.

g. If a player goes out at his first turn to play, players who have had no chance to play are credited or charged for their red threes in accordance with "f" above, and do not draw to replace such red threes.

h. If a player inadvertently fails to place a red three on the table at his first opportunity, before the next player has drawn, play continues without correction. He may rectify the error without penalty whenever it is his turn to play; except that if a player makes the correction before drawing, he must at that turn draw from the stock and may not take the discard pile. However, if the hand ends before this correction is made, the offender's side is penalized 500 points.

i. If a player fails to replenish his hand for a red three, he may not go out concealed, unless he can do so without making a discard.

j. A player may never discard a red three.

### *Giving and Receiving Information*

22. a. A player may:

1. Examine the discard pile before he has made his first discard (but at no other time).

2. Call attention to the correct minimum count requirement if his partner is in the act of making an initial meld.

3. Ask his partner, before the next player has drawn, whether he has drawn a card to replace his red three.

4. Remind his partner, who has obtained the discard pile, to pick up any remaining cards (see law 10d).

b. A player during his own turn to play, and at no other time (except as in "c" below) may:

1. Ask the minimum count requirement or the score of either side.

2. Ask any other player how many cards he holds. (The question must be answered correctly.)

3. Announce that he has only one card in his hand.

4. Count the number of cards remaining in the stock. (After counting he must announce the number.)

5. Turn the sixth card of a meld crosswise to indicate that only one more card is needed to form a canasta.

c. When asked permission to go out, a player before answering may exercise the rights given in "b" above.

### *Asking Permission to Go Out*

23. a. A player may ask "Partner, may I go out?" (it is recommended that only this phrase be used) at his turn to play, either before or after he draws from the stock; but may not ask the question after signifying his intention to take the discard pile. A player may go out without asking this question. The partner must reply either "yes" or "no" (nothing more), and the answer is binding. Before answering, the partner may exercise his rights as noted in law 22c.



b. A player must go out (if he possibly can) if he melds or indicates a meld *before asking* the question.

c. If the player, *after asking* the question but *before receiving a reply*, melds, indicates a meld, withdraws the question, or gives any other information; or if the partner, in giving a negative answer, transmits information: Either opponent may require the player to go out (if he possibly can) or not to go out.

d. *If when required to go out* under "c" above, the player states he *cannot go out*; or if *after receiving an affirmative answer* to the question, the player *cannot go out*; his side is penalized 100 points.

e. If a player who receives a negative answer to the question "Partner, may I go out?" proceeds to attempt to meld all of his cards, he must rearrange these melds so that at least one card will remain unmelded after he has discarded. The card or cards remaining unmelded are returned to his hand, and his side is penalized 100 points.

### *The Last Card of the Stock*

24. a. When a player draws the last card of the stock and then discards without going out, the next player:

1. *Must* take the discard pile if the discard matches one of his side's melds (provided the pack is not frozen). Exception: When a player holds but one card he may not take a discard pile that contains only one card (see law 14c).

2. *May* take the discard pile if he can, in accordance with laws 13b and 14.

b. Should the next player fail to take the discard pile, play ends and no more melds may be made by any player. If the next player takes the discard pile and discards without going out, the player who follows him has the same rights and obligations; and so on, until a player goes out or until some player at his turn to play fails to take the pile.

c. If no player goes out, the scores are counted, but no one receives the going out bonus.

### *Irregularities in the Draw from the Stock*

25. a. When a player draws the top card of the stock and sees or exposes another card or cards of the stock in the process, he must show the card or cards so seen or exposed to all the players and must replace them. (Should he draw a red three and see only the next card, it is treated as a normal draw.) He then completes his play. The first player to draw thereafter from the stock may, if he chooses, shuffle the stock before making his draw.

b. If a player draws two cards from the stock and adds them to the cards in his hand, he may not meld at that turn but must discard one card. At his next turn he may not draw, but may meld and must discard unless he melds out at that time. (Should one of the cards be a red three it must be placed on the table and credited to the opponents, and there is no other penalty.) If the offender draws more than two cards, he must forego melding and drawing for as many turns as the number of extra cards drawn.

c. If a player draws from the stock when it is not his turn:

1. If the card is not added to the cards in his hand and if it is an opponent's turn to play, he must show the card erroneously drawn to the

opponent whose right it was to draw that card, who may either take it or shuffle the stock before drawing.

2. If the card is not added to the cards in his hand and if it is his partner's turn to play, he must hand the card erroneously drawn to his partner, who is obliged to take it as his draw. The partner must meld or discard such card at that turn.

3. If the card is added to the cards in his hand, he may not draw, but must discard at his next turn to play; and the offender's side is penalized 100 points.

#### *Irregularities in the Draw from the Discard Pile*

- 26. a. If a player at his turn to play, melds the top card of the discard pile illegally (for legal melding see laws 13b2, 14a and 14b) and adds the rest of the pile to the cards in his hand, unless he can demonstrate to the satisfaction of his opponents that he could have melded it legally, all cards in his hand are placed face up on the table and the discard pile reconstructed. (In case of dispute as to which cards were in his hand and which in the discard pile, the opponents have the right of decision.) The offender then picks up his hand, draws from the stock, and completes his play normally.

b. Should a player draw from the discard pile when it is not his turn, and add the rest of the pile to the cards in his hand, all cards in his hand are placed face up on the table and the discard pile reconstructed, as provided in law 26a. The offender then picks up his hand, and his side is penalized 100 points.

#### *Illegal Melds*

27. If it is discovered during a player's turn to play that he has:

a. Placed cards on the table as an initial meld, but without sufficient count:

1. He may correct the irregularity by melding additional cards from his hand, in which case he may rearrange the cards put down in error. (If he does not meld all the cards put down in error, law 27b1 applies.)

2. He may return to his hand the cards put down in error, in which case his side is penalized for that hand only by the addition of 10 points to its minimum count requirement. For any similar subsequent offense the minimum count requirement is again increased by 10 points.

b. Placed cards on the table in any of the following manners:

1. To rectify an insufficient count requirement without melding all the cards exposed. The cards not melded are returned to the player's hand, and his side is penalized 100 points.

2. To attempt to complete the play of going out at the same turn to play in which he has received a negative answer to the question "Partner, may I go out?" law 23e applies.

3. To attempt the play of going out when his side has no canasta and when he is unable to complete one, his side is penalized 100 points; and the offender must return to his hand the minimum number of cards (melded in that turn) to enable him to discard and still retain one card in his hand. (The offender may pick up a complete meld rather than transfer a card from one meld to another.)

4. To add a fourth wild card to any meld, he may use it in any legal meld or discard it without penalty; but if he replaces it in his hand, his side is penalized 100 points.

5. To make any other illegal meld, he may rearrange the cards into legal melds without penalty and may discard one such card without penalty; but must replace in his hand any card not melded or discarded, and his side is penalized 100 points for such replacement.

#### *Condonement of Illegal Meld*

28. a. If a player makes an illegal meld, and the next player at his proper turn has drawn a card or placed cards on the table indicating his intention of taking the discard pile before attention is called to the illegal meld, there is no penalty. In such a case, an initial meld with insufficient count stands as a correct first meld; a combination of cards that does not form a meld is returned to the player's hand. (Exception: See law 27b4.)

b. The addition of a fourth wild card to a meld is never condoned, although such addition may not be corrected once the next player has drawn. Excess wild card or cards must remain on the table until the end of the deal, when they are deducted from the side's score as if still in the hand. (See law 34b2.)

#### *Correction of Illegal Meld*

29. If a player makes an illegal meld and attention is called to it before the next player at his proper turn has drawn a card or placed cards on the table indicating his intention of taking the discard pile, the offender may correct it immediately by rearranging the cards or adding cards from his hand or both; but a discard may not be withdrawn. If he can legally meld all the cards on the table, there is no penalty. If he does not meld them all legally, those cards that he does not meld are returned to his hand, and his side is penalized 100 points. (Exception: See law 27a.)

#### *Melding Out of Turn*

30. If a player melds out of turn:

a. At his right hand opponent's turn to play, the cards melded must be left on the table, and may not be considered melded, but must be melded when the offender's proper turn arrives.

b. At his left hand opponent's or partner's turn to play, the provision of "a" above applies and his side is also penalized 100 points.

c. If the hand ends before the offender's proper turn arrives, the cards melded in error are counted as though still in the offender's hand.

#### *Irregularities in the Discard*

31. a. If a player discards without drawing, and attention is called to the irregularity before the next player has drawn, the offender must draw the top card of the stock. If the next player draws before attention is called to the irregularity, the act stands without penalty (see law 28a).

b. If a player discards more than one card at the same time and attention is drawn to the irregularity before the next player has drawn, the offender chooses which shall be his discard. The other card or cards become penalty cards (see law 33).

c. If a player discards (nonsimultaneously) more than one card at one turn of play, the first discard stands; others become penalty cards (see law 33). If the next player draws before attention is called to the irregularity, the act stands without penalty.

#### *Exposed Cards*

32. a. If a player drops a card face up; or holds a card in such a position that his partner sees its face; or if a player indicates possession of a card by word or gesture: such card becomes a penalty card (see law 33).

b. When a player draws the top card of the stock and sees or exposes another card of the stock in the process, law 25a applies.

c. If each player has completed his first play and:

1. A card is found faced in the stock, it is turned and shuffled with the rest of the stock.

2. A foreign card is found in the pack, it is removed; if in a player's hand, it is removed and replaced immediately by the top card of the stock.

3. A missing card is found and no player admits to its ownership, it is shown to all players and put aside until the next deal.

#### *Penalty Cards*

33. a. Penalty cards must be left face up on the table but are not considered melded cards. At each of his turns to play, the offender may meld one or more of his penalty cards; whereupon no further penalty applies to those (melded) cards. If the offender cannot meld all of his penalty cards, he must discard one of the remaining (unmelded) penalty cards. When the offender has more than one penalty card, he may choose which of them to discard.

b. Penalty cards are treated exactly as cards in the player's hand for purposes of melding or taking the discard pile. If the hand comes to an end while a player has penalty cards still on the table, those cards are counted as though still in the offender's hand.

c. The discard of a wild card which is a penalty card, freezes the pack (see law 17b).

#### THE SCORE

34. a. At the end of each hand the score for each side is computed, written down, and added to any score made earlier in the game. A cumulative total is kept, and the game terminates at the end of any hand in which that total (for either side or both sides) reaches or exceeds 5000 points.

b. The score is computed for each hand in two parts:

1. A base score, consisting of a credit for bonuses and a debit for penalties (see laws 15b and 21f).

2. A point score, consisting of a credit for melded cards (including the cards in a completed canasta) and a debit for unmelded cards (see law 12). If any meld (whether or not a canasta) is discovered to contain more than three wild cards, the excess wild cards are debited as though still unmelded; and if there is any question as to whether the excess card is a deuce or a joker, the amount debited must be 50 points. The offending side is penalized 100 points for each such meld, but this penalty does not affect canastas in any other way.

c. A player who inadvertently mixes his melds with the rest of the deck before counting them forfeits their count.

d. A player who inadvertently mixes an opponent's melds with the rest of the deck before they are counted may not dispute that opponent's claim to their point value.

#### *Bonuses*

	Points
Natural canasta (no wild cards).....	500
Mixed canasta (one to three wild cards).....	300
Red three .....	100
Four red threes for one partnership.....	800
Going out .....	100
Going out "concealed" .....	200

#### *Melding Values*

Each joker .....	50
Each ace or deuce.....	20
Each king, queen, jack, ten, nine or eight.....	10
Each seven, six, five, four or black three.....	5

#### *Errors in the Score*

35. a. When two scores are kept and one is incorrect, the incorrect score is corrected as soon as the error is discovered. The correct score governs at all times.

b. An error in addition or subtraction may be corrected at any time. If such a correction is made during the play of a hand, the minimum count requirement for the meld in that hand is not altered by the correction.

c. When the score for a hand has been written down, it may not be corrected (except for mistakes in addition or subtraction) after the deal of the next hand has been completed.

#### *Proprieties*

36. It is improper to commit any irregularity deliberately, regardless of whether or not the prescribed penalty is paid. In the correction of an irregularity, the offender may exercise a choice whenever the laws offer one (as by the use of the word "may").

### FOR TWO, THREE, FIVE OR SIX PLAYERS

*The laws of four-hand canasta apply except as described hereinafter.*

#### FOR TWO PLAYERS

The pack is dealt first by the player who cuts the lower card, after which the deal alternates. Each player is dealt fifteen cards. When a player draws from the stock, he takes two cards instead of one; and discards one. When he draws from the discard pile or replenishes his hand for red threes, he does so in the regular manner. Should only one card remain in the stock, the player who draws it is deemed to have made his complete draw and must complete his play. If a player draws a red three as one of the last two cards of the stock, it is treated as a one-card draw (just described); if a

player draws a red three as the last card of the stock (one card draw), he may neither meld nor discard, and the hand ends: if a player draws two red threes as the last two cards of the stock, he may neither meld nor discard, and the hand ends. A player must have two canastas to go out. There are no penalty cards.

### FOR THREE PLAYERS

The player who cuts highest chooses his seat. The player who cuts lowest sits to his right and deals the first hand. Each player is dealt thirteen cards. At the end of the game the highest scorer wins from each opponent, and the second high scorer wins from the low scorer. (Players may agree that only the high scorer will be the winner; also that only eleven cards be dealt instead of thirteen.)

### FOR FIVE PLAYERS

The two who cut high form a team against the three who cut low. The team of two plays throughout; the team of three takes turns, one player sitting out each round. An inactive player may not advise his partners and has no rights except to correct an error in scoring at the end of a hand.

### FOR SIX PLAYERS

There are two forms of six-hand canasta:

1. The three who cut high form a team against the three who cut low. There are two inactive players during any hand, one from each team; otherwise the rotation of players is the same as for the team of three in the five-player game.

2. The three who cut high form a team against the three who cut low, but all six play, with partners sitting alternately. When a player asks permission to go out, he asks his left-hand partner, who answers "yes," "no," or "I pass." Should the left-hand partner elect to pass, the right-hand partner must reply either "yes" or "no."

### SAMBA—THREE PACK CANASTA

*The laws of four-hand canasta apply except as described hereinafter.*

The pack consists of three standard decks of fifty-two cards each, plus six jokers (a total of 162 cards, containing eighteen wild cards).

Fifteen cards are dealt to each player.

Players draw two cards and discard one. A player taking the discard pile draws no card from the stock at that turn.

Sequences (melds of three or more consecutive cards of the same suit) may be melded. A wild card or a three may never be used in a sequence. The top card of the discard pile may be joined directly to a previously melded sequence. A sequence is limited to seven cards. A sequence canasta is turned face down when completed. There is a bonus of 1500 points for a sequence canasta.

No more than two wild cards are allowed in a meld, and no wild card may be added to a canasta.

A partnership may make more than one meld of the same rank.

The discard pile may not be taken by laying on the table a card that matches the top card of the discard pile and a wild card; nor when the

top card of the discard pile matches a canasta (except with a pair of natural matching cards put down from the hand).

Game is 10,000 points. When 7000 points is reached, the minimum count requirement is 150 points.

Two canastas are necessary before a player may go out.

Three, four, five or six black threes may be melded from a player's hand, only when going out.

Bonus for going out: 200 points. There is no bonus for going out concealed; nor does going out concealed alter the minimum count requirement for the initial meld. When a side has melded two canastas, a bonus of 100 points is given for each red three and an additional 400 points for all six red threes. If a side has not made two canastas when the hand ends, it is debited like amounts for its red threes.

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